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IN EXCHANGE FOR A SOUL

A Novel

BY

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'BETWEEN THE HEATHER AND THE NORTHERN SEA,' 'HAGAR,
'THE HAVEN UNDER THE HILL,' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

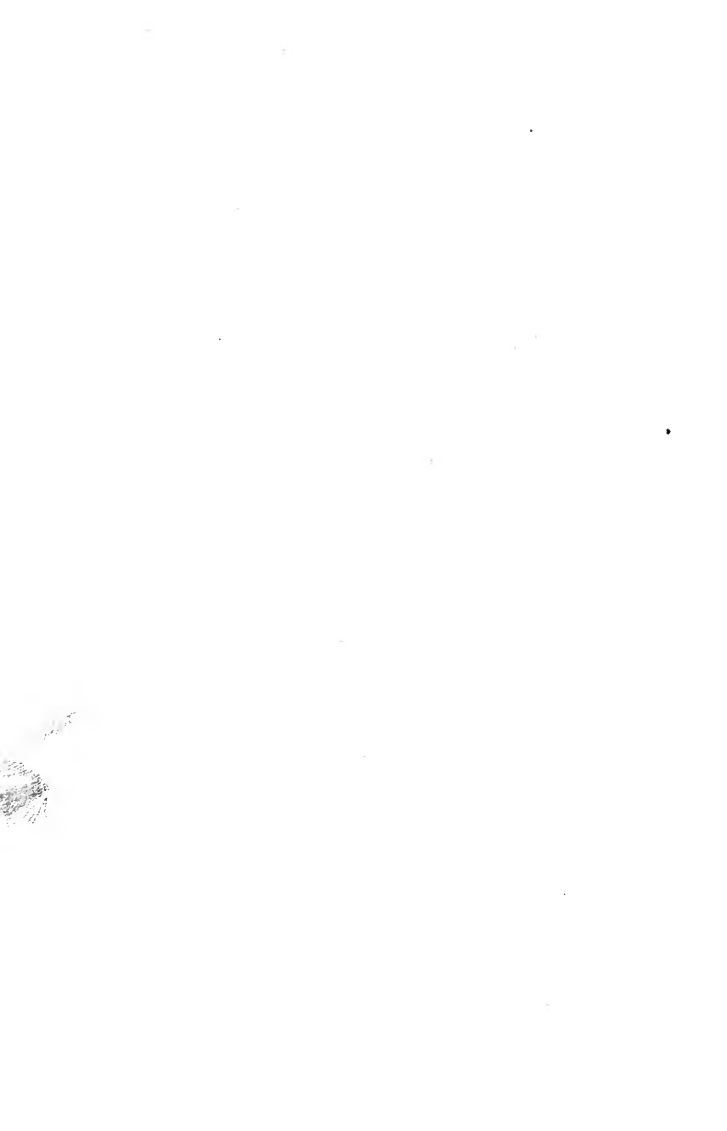
VOL. II.

London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1887

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1887
V. 2

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IN EXCHANGE FOR A SOUL.

CHAPTER XXVI.

‘ I MIND ME HOW WE PARTED THEN.’

‘ So have I dreamed ! oh, may the dream be true ;
That praying souls are purged from mortal hue,
And grow as pure as He to Whom they pray.’

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

DAMIAN ALDENMEDE, coming home in the moonlight alone, did not dream that Barbara Burdas was watching him from the side of the Forecliff, above the Sagged House. She stood in the shadow there, though it was nearly midnight, looking out over the cliff-top ways. The sea was rolling softly, breaking monotonously, even sadly for one in a sad mood ; and Bab’s mood was not of the brightest. An intolerable sense of yearning had possessed her all the evening, as if somewhere, some

influence were drawing her from herself ; and the strain was so great that she found herself to be wearier than usual—weary of life, of light, of all things. Once David Andoe had passed by, not stopping to speak, but looking at her as he went onward with the old heart-broken look that was growing to be so painful since Bab was learning what such pain meant. Yes, she knew now ; and as she stood there, thinking of the Rectory, trying to imagine what could be happening there, how each one would be looking at and speaking to the other, her knowledge seemed to deepen ; and presently, when her thoughts wandered away to Garlaff, to Hartas Theyn, who might be there, or might not, she could not help dropping a quiet tear or two. The quietness was not the measure of the bitterness.

‘ It’s hard to be sa lonely, an’ to care so for others all the while ; an’ all the while to know ’at you can never be nought to them,’ she said, half audibly. ‘ Mebbe I’d not mind it so if I weren’t sa lone !’

So she stood, wondering if perhaps the artist might pass that way—if he would stop and speak. It was one of Bab’s weak moments,

and her soul was hungering for a word. All was so still in the little house behind her, where her grandfather slept, and the children ; all was so still on the land and on the sea ; and the very stillness seemed to have aching in it, and pain.

'It *is* dree—oh, it *is* dree!' she cried softly to herself, clasping her hands, and lifting her eyes as if she would pierce the very stars for a sign. But none came that night. Her appeal was a prayer ; but not yet was it to be answered.

Bab did not see when the artist passed out of sight. The road was hidden by a point of the green cliff-top, and he did not reappear on the shoreward pathway. It was as she guessed. He had been drawn by the beauty of the night to go down to the rocks below, where the moonlight was quivering upon the wrack-fringed pools that the sea had left. He went on rapidly over the way he knew so well now ; keeping mainly to the shelving banks of sea-worn gravel that had collected just below the sand-dunes under the cliff. The moon was still sparkling upon the sea ; brightly, yet softly ; the small waves were still breaking with far faint murmurings. All

was bright light, or deep shadow ; all was silence, and peace, and beauty.

And all was calm, save the heart and brain of the man who was walking rapidly, fighting with himself, with a new and strong temptation ; a temptation that had come upon him suddenly, and yet not all undreaded. There had been a moment of warning ; a soul wounded long ago had spoken words of entreaty to a heart not yet beyond the possibility of further wounding. He had listened, promised obedience—and now the chance of keeping his promise was threatened grievously. But he was well aware.

The very rapidity of his movement betrayed the force of the emotion that was impelling him onward, beyond the Bight, beyond the Ness, beyond the rocks and caves he knew so familiarly.

It had not been so before. Love had come to him with all the soft and sweet enchantment of love. He had not known or dreamed of resistance.

Now, all was otherwise. He had loved ; he had been betrayed ; he had suffered—suffered so that he dreaded love as a man might

dread the most desolating disaster his human life could know.

Until this evening he had seen, and clearly, all that a second such passion might mean to him ; now he saw no longer. Here was the one serious sign of the pass to which he had come. Now he could perceive nought save the drawing, the delight, the good, the happiness—the most perfect happiness ever beheld by him, even in his most perfect vision.

All the drear dread days of his penance poured their depths into this day ; all the lost days of his delight returned their essence upon this.

‘I have been as one dead,’ he said to himself as he went onward ; ‘I have had life, and yet I have not lived ; I have had the appearance of living without the reality ; I have professed belief in hoping, whilst I myself was hopeless ; I have taught loving, whilst I myself was loveless. And now—*now* whither am I being led? May all that is good guide me ; all that is strong strengthen me, for I would not willingly fall—no, I would not fall again—such falling is too terrible. Half

my life has gone in trying to recover from that last undoing, and I thought its effect not yet over. Was it over? It is a dozen years since—more than a dozen, I think ; but I hardly know, since time has gone by on wings so broken—now speeding feverishly, now halting faintly—but never at a natural pace. . . . And what does this portend, this change, this sudden glow of light—the light of hope? Another disaster? or compensation for the last? . . . If it might mean the latter, if it might ! Dare I think it will ? Does Fate ever take a sudden turn in the middle of a man's life, lifting him from the lowest depth of negation to the supreme height of fulfilment? Is it possible? There are those who declare that it is not—that a life once certainly set on ill-fated lines can come to no true point of turning, of real escape ; but that I do not believe, I have never believed it ; too much lies in a man's own hand for any pre-dooming of that kind to be taken as a rule. No ; it could never be ! Far better the old and worn-out proverb that declares that it is a long lane that has no turning ! . . . Dare I hope that I have come to a turning? . . . How good she

looks! how pure! how true! Her every expression has sympathy in it, and perception, with now and then faint touches of something that is almost sadness. It is like a question, that sad look, like an appeal! More than once I longed to know her thought, as if it must be something needing help, needing consolation. . . . Shall I see her to-morrow? Will she come down to the beach? Shall I venture there, or shall I fly by the first train to-morrow morning? . . . If I did—if I even did that, my life would no more be the life it has been!

So absorbed had Damian Aldenmede been in his own reflections that certain sounds, not very distinct or aggressive, had fallen upon his ear almost without his noticing them; then all at once it seemed to him that he heard human voices in the distance, voices that seemed raised in anger or distress. The sound came from beyond the point of the dark rock that stretched across the beach; and very naturally he hastened onward, feeling more and more certain each step that he should find some one in need of assistance. But all at once, just as he rounded the point of rock, the

sounds fell upon the air, fell to a lower tone, and more pathetically moving.

Before he saw the dark figure kneeling upon the sands he knew that only one voice was uplifted, the voice of a man in a very agony of prayer. Instinctively he stood still, took off his hat, and prayed with and for the lonely suppliant, who knelt with bared brow and uplifted hands under the midnight sky. No thought of retreating occurred to the artist.

He did not at first dream that it was David Andoe who knelt thus. That it was one of the fishermen of the neighbourhood he knew by the tone and the dialect ; but by-and-by he discerned that it was the man whose love for Barbara Burdas was apparently one of the chief topics of conversation at Ulvstan.

He was near enough to hear most of the words that fell tremulously from the man's lips ; touching, simple words they were ; and though in a sense familiar, they were yet reverently uttered.

' Oh, Jesus ! ' he was saying, ' let ma speak yet again, an' yet again hear ma whiles Ah'm speakin' ! Ah've never another friend—no,

not one 'at cares ; an' my heart's well-nigh breakin' wi' sorrow. Ah'm fair sick wi' sorrow, an', worse nor that, my sorrow's leadin' me inta sin. Ah'm thinkin' on *her* when Ah should be thinkin' o' Thee ; prayin' 'at she may turn te me when Ah'd better be prayin' for grace te turn more wholly to Thee. All my prayers is tainted wi' the thought of her, an' oftens enuff Ah can't pray at all. Ah can't see Thee for the sight of her comin' atween ; an' what can Ah do? What can Ah do to stop my heart fra achin' an' yearnin'? What *can* Ah do?

And then the pleading voice fell a little, the words became indistinct, and Aldenmede would have turned away silently, as he had come ; but he could not: some constraining force of sympathy drew him a little nearer. He would speak with David Andoe when his prayer was ended. The words were more audible again now.

'Whatever happens to me, be good te *her*,' the poor fellow was continuing. 'Let no trouble come anigh *her*. Keep her fra doin' aught 'at's wrong, aught 'at 'ud bring misery to her afterward. An' if she has ony sorrow

now, do Thou comfort it, comfort it *Thyself*, wi' that love o' Thine, that love 'at Ah can't yet feel rightly mysel'. Somehow Ah know it's there ; Ah believe in it wi' my head, but Ah can't get hold on it wi' my heart, not so as to feel happy wiv it, and satisfied. 'That's what Ah'm wantin', but Ah can't get hold on it. Ah niver could, not so as te be no help te me when Ah was needin' help. . . . An' Ah need it noo ! if iver Ah wanted upholdin' Ah do to-night ! Ah'm sa despart lone—Ah'm a'most faint wi' louness an' unfriendedness, an' wi' the want o' peace ; Ah've no peace nowheres, not even a place where Ah can lie my head i' peace. . . . An' mebbe it hes te be so, mebbe it hes, so as Ah may larn 'at there's no peace nowheres oot o' Thee—*none but that 'at passes all understandin'*. . . . God gie me that—that precious peace !

Once more the pleading voice trembled and failed, and by-and-by another sound came upon the wind, the sound of painful, convulsive sobbing. The moon was half hidden in a nest of clouds, there were shadows upon the sands of the Bight. Then by-and-by all was still, silent.

The fisherman, yet kneeling, heard the steps upon the beach behind him, and rose to his feet just as the moon swept herself free of the clouds that were driving on. He recognised the artist, who spoke at once.

'Forgive me,' he said in kindly and sympathetic tones. 'I had not dreamed of finding anyone on the beach so late. . . . I was walking here because I was troubled, not thinking to find anyone in the same trouble, or nearly the same, as my own. Believe me, I meant no intrusion.'

David hesitated awhile. He had heard much of what had been said on the Forecliff about the stranger's influence over Barbara, but the freemasonry which exists between one true soul and another had hitherto prevented him from having any doubt, any fear of the artist. Yet now for a moment all was changed. Andoe was trying to collect himself so far that he might do no injustice to another, but in his large sympathy not much effort was needed.

'Ah'm noän sure as I understand, sir,' he replied. 'You've heard me, you've heard as Ah was i' trouble, an' you saäy your

trouble's the same as mine. . . . Do Ah understand ya rightly?—you're carin' for *her*, for Barbara Burdas?'

The poor fisherman could not see the expression on the artist's face; it might have been helpful to him if he could.

'For Barbara Burdas!' Aldenmede exclaimed in a tone most comforting. 'I was not even thinking of her at the present moment, except in connection with yourself. No; to prevent misunderstanding, let me say plainly that I was thinking of some one else. and for sympathy's sake I may add, some one who is troubling me much as Barbara is troubling you. I think it was this drew me to come and speak to you, instead of turning back, as I was moved to do at first. . . . I thought that perhaps I might say a word to comfort you, or, if not that, I thought that mere sympathy might be some consolation. I have often in my life found it so—that to speak with one who had endured the same suffering as myself was in some subtle way very helpful.'

'Ah doän't doobt,' said the fisherman, only half understanding much that he had heard.

Presently he said, 'You've seen a good bit o' Barbara lately, sir?'

'Yes, I have; and I may add that the more I have seen of her the better I have liked her.'

'That was certain. . . . But you spoke o' comfort—surely you'd never ha' done that if you'd known all they were sayin'—the folks i' the toon—at she's only one thought, an' that for the Squire's son.'

'I have heard of that. . . . I have thought of it. I may say that I have thought of it a good deal.'

'D'ya know him, sir?'

'I have seen him once.'

'Then that would be yesterday—yesterday afternoon?'

'Yes, so it was! It seems a week ago!'

'Ah were passin' by at the time—me an' my mates. An' 'twere that made my heart sa sore, that drove me out here last night, an' again to-night, to seek for a spot where Ah could be alone. . . . Ah'd noä other place.'

'And I have disturbed you? . . . I am sorry, very sorry! But I meant well.'

'That Ah'm sure on, sir. An' since you've

spokken so kind, Ah may saäy 'at more nor once Ah'd wished ta hev speech o' ya. Knowin' 'at you'd influence over Bab, Ah thought mebbe 'at if ye knew all ya'd say a word for me. Ah believe—naäy, Ah know—as she'd take a deal o' notice o' what you saäy. . . . An' hoo can Ah tell ya the rest? Hoo can Ah tell you o' the one she seems to ha' set her heart on? Ah noän wish te be guilty o' the sin o' evil-speaking—a sin 'at surely does such harm i' the world as only Satan hissself can know on—noä; God helpin' me, Ah'll noän saäy aught again him as Ah can help. Ah'll only ask ya ta think for yourself as ta whether one like me, 'at's plashed i' the saut water for my bread ever sen Ah was eleven years old, 'ud be more likely te win bread for her an' hers nor a skip-jack like yon, 'at's walked the eth wiv his han's in his pockets an' a pipe in his mouth, well-nigh iver sen he could walk at all? Ah'll leave it to you, sir, te think that question oot, and then to act as seems ya best. Ah'll saäy nought o' myself o' my oän trouble. . . . Mebbe you've heerd anuff. An' if Ah've said aught o' him Ah shouldn't ha' said, aught 'at sounded like

malice or a bad sperrit, why, then, forgive it, please, sir, an' forget it. Ah noän meant ta be malicious.'

It was only a word or two that Damian Aldenmede said in reply—a word of assurance, of comprehension. But the fisherman went on his way comforted; the artist went on his way somewhat perplexed, yet with a very definite picture in his own mind of David Andoe's happiness by some cottage fireside with Barbara Burdas for the spring and inspiration of his happiness.

And a touch of something that was almost envy came with the vision. A home fireside, a happy home! Surely that was the Alpha and Omega of human felicity! Given the highest hopes, the highest ambitions, even aspirations, yet when were such ever reached by men whose home-life was chilled, embittered? Loneliness might be *endurable*, but it was only that. The man who had no sustenance save such as came to him from contact with the outer world was a man to be pitied indeed. His life could know no true encouragement, no true support. In times of failure, or of pain, what had he to rest upon

for consolation? In hours of success, if such came to him, of what value was the thing that men were congratulating him upon? It had not even a name of any real import. It was not happiness; it was not content; it was not felicity! Success was hardly successfulness to the man who must meet his day's ending in an empty room, by a lonely fireside, with not a hand to clasp his in the warmth of the new emotion; not a voice to say 'Well done'; not a heart to beat in unison with his own heart's increased pulsation.

Much of the artist's thought as he went homeward was for himself, much for David Andoe and Barbara Burdas; and the strong feeling he had for the latter found some expression in his conversation with Barbara; but to his regret he was quickly made to perceive that his words were but as snow-flakes upon a running stream of contrary emotion. Bab had no thought of David Andoe, save of his pain and of his trouble, of which she was but too well aware; she had no other thought of him

'Don't speak of it,' she had said in conclusion.
'Don't speak of it never again. . . . My life's

over—all that's worth the name o' life. I'll live, God helpin' me; I'll live for many a year yet. I mun do that for the sake o' them 'at needs my life. Ya can tell David that—it may quiet him; it's quietin' for me. . . .
S Yes; just tell him that my life's o'er. . . .
I've made the last moän I'll make i' this world, or so I think! There's no knowin' what's i' store.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WILD NIGHT'S WORK.

‘A man can have but one life and one death.

. Let me fulfil my fate.’

ROBERT BROWNING.

AFTERWARD, long afterward, it was said that there had been a settled plan for the work of that wild night in the Bight of Ulvstan; but the saying was untrue. The whole, from first to last, was a consecutive series of accidents, undesigned, and in a certain sense unpremeditated; one leading to another by the sort of inevitableness that is not so uncommon in human life, as anyone might perceive who was careful in noting such sequences.

It all happened on the night following that on which the artist and David Andoe had met so unexpectedly on the beach. Neither had

then dreamed of what the next night was to bring.

As it has been told, they met and separated somewhere about midnight. The artist had gone home, but not to rest; sleep was impossible. The only possible thing was bewildering and torturing thought. Before dawn he rose, went down to the sea for his bath, and returned to the Forecliff to watch the grand stormy rising of the sun. It was impressive that morning beyond description. The rose-red bars lay straight across the sky between bars of orange-vermilion, and these again were bounded by bands of burning scarlet. Not the faintest, floating, formless cloud disturbed the impression made by the long, unbroken, glowing lines. No painter—not even Turner himself—might even have attempted to reproduce such a sky; its calmness of form, its dazzling luminousness of colour, its tragic glow of intensity. All the morning the influence of it was upon the receptive mind of the artist. He expected some sudden storm to arise; and when, about noon, the sun was obscured, the whole sky overspread by a gray, leaden cloud which

showed only a rift here and there, disclosing the ærial silver fields beyond, he felt that the change was but the precursor of something wilder and more majestic. Yet no wind had arisen as yet; not a ripple disturbed the cold ominous gray of the boundless sea.

So the evening closed in; a dead leaden colouring was upon the outdoor world everywhere. The great gray gulls flapped their wings slowly between a gray heaven and a grayer world of waters. Hardly a sail was visible in the offing. The herring fleet had gone northward, and was in safer shelter than that afforded by Ulvstan Bight; only a pleasure-boat or two remained moored by the quay. The greater part of the smaller craft of the place had been drawn up to the Fore-cliff; they were better there.

It might be eight o'clock when Barbara came out to the door of the Sagged House, glancing to the north and to the south with her usual discerning glance. Not a star had appeared; no moon might pierce that dense cloud-pall which had seemed to hang lower and yet lower each time she had observed it. And ever the same ominous stillness brooded

beneath, upon the land, and upon the deep, chill darkness of the pitiless sea.

‘It’ll be on us afore mornin’!’ Bab said to herself, turning to go indoors again. ‘Thank God ’at most about here’s i’ shelter. There’ll noän be a soul I know out on yon sea to-night.’

It was growing colder now—much colder. A little later Damian Aldenmede, sauntering down to the beach to smoke his last cigar, was surprised by the change in the temperature.

‘If I remain at Ulvstan much longer I shall have to write and ask Carel to send me a greatcoat or two,’ he said audibly as he increased his pace.

Still he remained there, walking up and down between the Ness and the Forecliff, now facing north and now south, but finding not much difference whichever way he turned. It was a strange night. The mere air, which was hardly stirred as yet, seemed to have the force and the peculiar biting quality of a strong north-easter, though such wind as there was came off the land. And there was no change either on the ocean or in the sky.

The cloud-mass still loomed above, seeming as if fain to drop its gloomy weight upon the wide, and dark, and gloomy sea.

At last the sigh arose—the long, low, tristful sigh, the first breath of the storm, which seemed to sweep across the face of the water with a sadness like to that of the sigh that is heard before the last breath passes from out the lips of the dying.

The storm sigh rises, it sweeps onward, not coming to a moan, not fluttering or hurrying the lightest wavelet. There is no visible sign—yet you see it; there is only [the faintest audible sound, yet you not only hear it, but, hearing, you shiver, and, if you have dread for anyone, turn faint for the strife to be.

Then the pause comes—a dead stillness, as if the natural progress of the world were arrested. One might imagine that the earth itself had ceased to move.

But this is only for a while; sometimes it is a very brief while, sometimes it is longer. Of this evening it was afterwards said that this strange interval had lasted so long that it was thought that the storm might be passing by

without breaking on this part of the north-eastern coast.

It was at the very beginning of the calm period that a little band of men came out from the small inn on the quay, known as the Cod and Lobster. They were fishermen, all of them : and two, Jim Tyas and John Scurr (Lang Jack, the name he was better known by), were David Andoe's mates, and each held shares in the *Star of the North*. David was not among them. The *Star of the North* was with a portion of the herring-fleet off Danesborough ; and David, with Will Scurr and Luke Furniss, had remained on board. The two others had walked over to Ulvstan for the night, as they often did. They would return at daybreak.

Most of the evening they had spent in the little inn, smoking long clay pipes, drinking muddy beer, denouncing trawlers and steamers, gossiping of this neighbour and of that, but more than all of David Andoe and his trouble. They were angry, but not excited, when they went out, so Ann Stamper, the lone old woman who was landlady of the Cod and Lobster, had said afterward, and there

her testimony ended. She knew nothing more.

They sauntered on awhile, the four men ; then Lang Jack went home, as he was in the habit of doing, having a wife capable of eliciting the 'reason why' when he did not. It was after ten now, yet the others stood about on the narrow, rugged quay, and then went down to the beach, still smoking, still angrily discussing the manner and method of the revenge they meant to take when opportunity served. One was for adopting the time-honoured and effective process known as 'tarring and feathering ;' another, in a moment of bitterness, had suggested that the Squire's son should be decoyed on board some vessel in the offing and subjected to the punishment known as keel-hauling.* But since Hartas Theyn had one day done some small kindness to Samson Verrill's little son, Sampey had demurred to these more violent measures.

* For the benefit of the uninitiated it may be explained that keel-hauling was a mode of punishment used at sea in former times. The offender, having heavy leaden weights attached to his feet, was dragged by means of ropes to and fro under the keel of the ship.

‘Let’s give him a duckin’, an’ ha’ done wi’ it,’ Sampey said. ‘Let’s pop him under water at the point o’ the Ness at high-tide, and then let him go.’

And thereupon Jim Tyas had given expression to his opinion that Verrill was a sneak and a spiritless coward. Sampey was not a man to bear such an accusation tamely. His pipe was dashed down, his jacket off, before the others were aware of his intention.

‘Come on—we’ll fight that oot, thoo an’ me!’ he said with subdued passion.

Of course, Jim Tyas was ready. Richard Reah had no thought of interfering; and in the light of later events it seemed almost sad that interference should have come in any shape whatever. Before the first blow had been struck, a step came up quickly behind; a stranger’s voice broke in hurriedly:

‘What’s up? Who’s goin’ to fight in the dark, an’ at this time o’ night? What’s the row about?’

There was yet no moon; but a rift in the heavy purple-black cloud disclosed a steely glare that enabled the fishermen to recognise that this stranger was no other than the man

whose conduct they had been discussing, whom they had been desiring to get into their power by any means. And now, when the hot blood of anger was already coursing along their veins, it was surely the worst of moments for him to come in contact with them. Before he knew what had happened he was struggling with the three men—three against one—and two of them certainly mad against him. For Dick Reah had thought of Bab almost as long as David Andoe had done ; though a certain rude sense of honour had restrained him from expressing his preference by other than indefinite ways and means. Yet Bab knew, and he was aware that she knew ; and the knowledge kept up a certain amount of uneasy sensation on either side. Certainly the feeling he had for her added to the strength of the present moment's passion.

Sampey Verrill's voice was the only one heard above the strife :

‘Let him hev a chance!’ Verrill pleaded. ‘It's noän fair, three again one! . . . An' giv' him a chance o' speakin'! Let's hear if he's owt to säy for hissel'. Let him speak!’

‘Speak!’ exclaimed Jim Tyas breathlessly. His blood was up as thoroughly as that of Hartas Theyn, who was struggling to defend himself in no unscientific manner. ‘Speak! He’s spokken ower much. . . . We’ll put a stop tiv his speakin’!’

‘Mak’ him promise!’ shouted Dick Reah. ‘Mak’ him promise ’at he’ll niver oppen his lips to Bab Burdas ageeän ; ’at he’ll niver come near her, nor even near the hoose she lives in. . . . Give him that chance. Mak’ him promise ; an’ then give him a good dressin’ and let him go.’

The suggestion seemed fair enough, but it was not readily acted upon. The strife continued for a few moments because the impetus accumulated did not permit of its being stopped all at once. The fishermen had been trying to bring Hartas to the ground ; but, strange to say, they only succeeded after some difficulty. He had more muscular strength than they had anticipated, and he had some knowledge of the science of self-defence. At last, however, they were successful, and Reah repeated his suggestion.

‘Ya hear what Dick says?’ Jim Tyas asked, when Hartas was on his feet again. ‘Ya hear that? If ya’ll promise we’ll let ya go, for te-neet. Ah’ll noän saäy it means peace for iver; but ya can goä for this time, if ya promise—promise to keep away fra Bab Burdas, fra the hoose she lives in—naäy, fra the varry toon!’

‘I will not make one of those promises,’ Hartas replied firmly and clearly.

He was not blind to his position. He knew himself to be at the mercy of three strong, unscrupulous, vengeful men—men to whom revenge was as a natural instinct, not to be subdued without dread of the slur of effeminacy.

Yet he did not yield.

‘I will not make one of those promises,’ he said; and the reply came quickly :

‘You’ll either promise or you’ll go where there’ll be no more chance o’ promisin’.’

‘Then I choose the latter.’

‘You do?’

‘I do.’

‘Wi’ yer eyes oppen?’

‘More open than yours appear to be.’

‘Then hev at him, mates!’ Jim Tyas exclaimed savagely, preparatory to suiting his action to his word; but Sampey made another effort to arrest Jim’s wild, mad impetuosity.

‘It’ll noän do to murdther the fool—remember that; an’ that’ll be the end on’t afore we know, if we doän’t tak’ care. . . . Noo think a minnit, Jim! An’ let’s thry this—let’s put the idiot into yon boat o’ Dandy Will’s, an’ row him oot to sea, an’ leave him there—leave him if he won’t promise, fetch him back if he will!’

The suggestion was no sooner made than steps were taken to carry it into effect. Hartas Theyn was bound with the ropes that were only too ready, and then placed in one of the tiny, gaily-painted little pleasure-boats that had been moored alongside the quay. The oars had been removed when the boat was made fast. Very speedily the men launched it, placed themselves in another and a larger one, took the little craft in tow, and made ready for starting. At the last moment Sampey Verrill shouted :

‘Promise!’

‘Never!’

Away the two boats went, the fishermen pulling as if their lives depended on their exertions, and in a few minutes they were out upon the wide black ocean, full of revenge, of triumph, of determination.

And Hartas Theyn’s determination was as strong as theirs. Though he lay in the boat, bound hand and foot, shivering with cold now that the struggle was over and he was out upon the dark heaving water, he yet kept his courage.

He was aware that the battle would be fought out at sea, too far from the land for any sound to be heard, any help afforded; yet no thought of breaking his resolve came to him. No promise should be wrung from him by such means as this.

With all his faults, he was yet no coward, and the stubbornness natural to his race might almost be counted as a virtue in a crisis like this.

He knew that the present action was the result of no deep-laid plot; yet had it been so it could hardly have been more effective for the purpose of the men who were con-

cerned in it. They were still pulling to the utmost of their power. Hartas, raising himself in the boat, watched the receding lights of the Bight, and knew that they were going rather to the north than to the south, though he was well aware that this would signify but little to him if they fulfilled their threat. And that they would fulfil it he knew but too certainly.

Till now that strange calm had lasted, brooding ominously upon earth and sea ; but Hartas became aware that change was impending. A breeze was rising, beginning to sigh and wail ; a chill, piercing breeze it was, and the lapping of the waves by the very edge of the little boat was a dreary sound in the ear of the man who lay there anticipating the coming ordeal, and nerving himself for it with what strength was left him. But even yet he was unshaken by any thought of yielding, of surrender.

If it came to the worst, he could die, and some day Bab might come to know how and why he had died. That was the one comforting thought that he had ; she might come to know, she might even regret. And strange to

say it did comfort him, even this—that by his death he might win

‘Such tears
As would have made life precious.’

Strange it is, and sad, that a human life should so often miss the one human preciousness—the preciousness of love, with all the sympathy, all the compassion, all the sustenance that a worthy love includes!

Strange and sad, for you, for me, if we have so missed that best, lasting good; stranger and sadder far to have known it and lost it! Ah, that bitter, that unspeakably bitter losing!

Was Barbara Burdas to find how bitter it was? Were there any others who might see and suffer, but *too late*?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

' ALONE, ALONE, ON A WIDE, WIDE SEA !'

' Then all was still. Upon me fell the night,
And a voice whispered to me, "*Life is Past.*" '

JOHN PAYNE.

STILL the two boats went onward over the dark heaving sea ; the three rowers rowing swiftly and silently as might be, under the dark silent sky.

It was past midnight now ; the heaving water was heaving more strongly against the sides of the little boat ; the heavy pall of cloud was beginning to break and scatter and drift wildly across the heavens ; now disclosing a glimpse of the wan moon that was riding high by this time, yet veiling her face, as if not wishing to look upon that scene of cruelty, of inhumanity.

Hartas Theyn was still awaiting the coming

moment with sufficient fortitude; and almost he persuaded himself that he was indifferent. Truth to say, young as he was, he was very weary; life had never been a very happy or very pleasant thing to him. He had been to blame, as he knew, and had confessed. He had lived idly, carelessly, thoughtlessly; and, worse than all (it seemed worse now in this hour of testing), he had resisted the help of those who would have helped him from himself. This was the painful sting that lent its piercing to the chill of the wind on the midnight sea.

Yet it did not embitter his thought or emotion. When at last the rowers laid their oars on the rowlocks, and after brief consultation turned to him, though his determination was as resolute as before, he was less vehement in the expression of it. He did not even take the trouble to raise himself from the side of the boat in which he lay bound.

Unfortunately Jim Tyas was the spokesman; the rancorous and truculent one of the three, though it may be that Dick Reah was not far behind in evil will.

‘Here’s a last chance for ya!’ Jim shouted,

standing up in the stern of the larger boat, and hauling the grating tow-rope as he spoke so as to bring the two boats nearer. 'A last chance! Give us yer word an' honour 'at ya'll keep away fra' Barbara Burdas, an' fra the Forecliff, an' we'll row ya back to the quay wi' niver another word! But refuse, an' you're left driftin' here, oot at sea, ov a dark night, with never so much as a sail i' sight, an' wi' never a bite o' meat, nor a sup o' water; left to drift te the north, or te the south, as wind and wave may take you—or what's likelier far, left to drift downwards to the bottomless pit. Tak' yer choice.'

'I've done so already.'

'An' yer mind's noän changed?'

'Never for a second.'

'It may be as you're ower much of an idiot to tak' in what we're meanin',' Dick Reah broke in with characteristic impetuosity. 'Think again, ya fool! What'll ya do two hours after this—ay, or less nor that, when ya find the waves chopping ower the sides o' that bit o' boat you're in as if she were a cockle-shell? What'll you do then? Think on it for a moment—that is, if ya've brain

anuff to tak' it in.' Think of hoo ya'll feel when ya're goin' doon to the bottom, an' niver a soul near ya, even to see when or where ya go.'

'My brain can see all I wish to see, thank you,' Hartas replied, speaking with a dignity, a calmness so unusual as to be a surprise to himself. He had not even raised his head as he spoke, and his tones were untainted by any harshness, any defiance. A keen instinct might have discerned an underlying sadness; but no such instinct was there out upon the dark water. Still, Samson Verrill was moved to make yet another effort.

'Look here, you son of a squire—a fine squire's son you are! But all the same, look here—this is suicide you're committin'!'

'Or you are committing murder, which is it?' Hartas asked calmly.

'An' what o' that?' Jim Tyas asked mockingly. 'It 'ud not be the first murder done on the seas atween the points of Ulvstan Bight—no, not the first by a lot. There's more sorts o' murder nor one. An' who'll know o' this, think ya?'

Hartas hesitated for one impressive moment ; then he said quietly, emphatically :

‘It will be known. There will be evidence you little dream of.’

What might move him to speak so, he could hardly have told ; yet the quiet, oracular tone in which he spoke was not without its effect upon the men who heard. The night was still a dark one ; the moon was behind a bank of thick cloud ; the wind was wailing sadly, wildly, coldly. Sampey Verrill, with only his shore-going jacket on, was shivering in a way he was not much acquainted with. The wind he knew, and the sea he knew ; but strong and deep emotion was something to be dreaded.

‘Are ya *mad*?’ Sampey asked, coming to the stern of the boat, and standing a little behind Jim Tyas. ‘Are ya clean daft ? Ya’ve only got to saäy a word, an’ back ya’ll go, wi’ no more harm upon ya nor if ya’d been sittin’ i’ yer oän arm-chair.’

‘Oh, he’ll sit on a sofy, *he* will, wiv a sixpenny cigar atween his lips,’ Dick Reah interposed by way of aside.

And Sampey Verrill added, perhaps not

without undertone of warning to his word :
'The boat'll do better nor even a sofy.
It'll be more like a rockin' chair by-and-
by.'

But the patience of Jim Tyas, never a large store at the best, was being rapidly exhausted.

'We've had anuff o' this!' he exclaimed, moving away with an impatient gesture. Then, turning again to the stern of the boat, taking a huge knife from his pocket, and unclasping it with ostentation, he said, speaking loudly, emphatically : 'Ah'll give ya a last chance, an' then yer life 'll be i' yer oän hand. Will ya mak' that promise, or will ya not ?'

The answer came clearly, deliberately:

'I will not.'

No more was said just then. None dared to prevent Jim Tyas from cutting the rope that held the smaller boat in tow ; strand by strand, and with scientific manipulation, he did it. . . . There was only a last fibre.

'Speak, ya fool!'

But no one spoke.

Hartas Theyn felt the moment when the

last strand was severed, the boat set adrift ; he felt it through his very soul as with a shock, yet comparatively but a slight shock. It was much as if some one had opened a vein in his body, from out of which his life would slowly but surely flow.

For perhaps one minute the two boats had drifted apart ; yet the space between was a wide one. The sky seemed darker and wilder ; the waters blacker and more turbulent. Then once more a voice came from out the distant gloom :

‘ Will ya saäy that word, ya born idiot ?’

It was Samson Verrill’s voice, and there was an undertone of strong entreaty in it ; but no response was made.

For a long while they listened, but there came never any response.

CHAPTER XXIX.

‘HAST THOU THEN WRAPPED US IN THY
SHADOW, DEATH ?’

‘And yet that hollow moaning will not go,
Nor the old fears that with the sea abide.’

WILLIAM M. W. CALL.

As some of the older people had expected, that night was one of the wildest nights ever known on the north-east coast of England.

The story of it—or rather a mere outline of the story—may be read in the local chronicles of that day. It is told in the usual brief, journalistic fashion how the sloop *Joanna*, of Sunderland, came ashore at Flamboro’; how her crew were drowned, all but the little cabin-boy, who was washed ashore, stunned and senseless, and awoke to learn that his father had gone down in that

same squall only a few miles farther to the south.

The next wreck to come ashore was the schooner *Viking*. Though the vessel was registered as sailing from Hild's Haven, the crew were all of them Ulvstan men. There were six of them—a father, his brother, his three sons, and a cousin. They had been caught out at sea suddenly during that wild night, and almost immediately the little vessel had sprung a leak. It had probably seemed to the crew, in the first moments of their danger, that it was a matter of congratulation that distress had come upon them so near to their own home. They made at once for the Bight of Ulvstan ; but in those days the men of the Bight had no help to offer ; no lifeboat was stationed there, no rocket-apparatus ; they could only go up to the cliff-top with the wives and children, the parents and sisters of the men in danger, and watch there. They presently saw that the crew had 'taken up aloft.' But the sea was breaking over the rigging. One tremendous wave was seen to wash several of them off into the boiling surf ; this was about day-

break, and at last the ship went down. Before she quite sank, the top-gallant-mast was seen to be out of the water, with men clinging to it, in sight of their agonized and powerless friends. But the storm went on raging ; and at last, one by one, the poor fellows were seen to drop off, to battle with the furiously-dashing sea below for a moment or two, and then to go under.

If you should ask for any of the Burrells of Ulvstan Bight now, you would receive for answer, ‘ *The sea gat him !* ’

An hour or two later, when the crimson of the rising sun had ceased to flush the tossing surf with fiery colour, another vessel came in sight, remained visible for a few minutes, and then suddenly disappeared with all hands on board. Later the hull of this brigantine washed up, and her name-board proved her to have been the *Marie Sieden* of Rotterdam.

The captain, a young man of not more than five-and-twenty, was found lashed to the helm, his right arm broken, a pitiless bruise on his left temple. There was still a smile on the dead placid face. A lovely miniature on ivory, a portrait of a young girl, golden-haired (a

rich red gold it was), blue-eyed, crimson-lipped, was near the heart of the drowned captain of the *Marie Sieden*. Two days later strangers laid him to rest in the quiet churchyard at Market Yarburgh ; and he was not unwept.

Naturally enough these days of storm and stress were days of great excitement in Ulvstan Bight. When the tide was out the fisher-folk gathered about the sands and the foot of the Forecliff ; when it was high and the storm was at its worst, they went up to the quay and to the ledges of shaly rock that ran to the southward of the Bight. This they did especially when any sail was in sight, watching the labouring of the distant vessel as it passed from point to point, wondering what its fate might be. But very few ships passed by, and these were screw-steamers for the most part, more equal to the fight with wind and wave than the wooden-built, canvas-spiced vessels that awoke so much more interest. It was the oak or teak built brig, the white sail, that aroused the fears of every heart watching in or near the Bight of Ulvstan.

All day the excitement was kept up in an

intermittent way, and at nightfall it increased. There were two or three vessels in sight; one seemed as if it might hold on its way with some chance of safety; the second, a brigantine, appeared to be driving more or less at the mercy of the waves; a third, the *Lady Godiva* of Danesborough, a schooner with only four men on board, was evidently trying to make for the beach when the night began to fall, and the chance for her crew, with that awful sea whitening all the bay, seemed very small indeed—they must surely know how small, those poor storm-driven souls whose own home was not so very far away. Yes; they would know all the coast, its dangers, its advantages, its possibilities. Yet they were trying to run aground in Ulvstan Bight, that was evident.

It seemed as if not only the population of Ulvstan was there to watch the on-coming of the little schooner, but people from all the neighbourhood round about. Barbara Burdas, with two of the three little lads beside her, was out upon the Forecliff. Old Ephraim was down below answering Mrs. Kerne's brusque questions with a quite

equal brusqueness, yet he was not at all averse from receiving a shilling for his apparently grudgingly-given information. Jim Tyas, with Dick Reah, Samson Verrill, and a dozen others, were by the edge of the quay, waiting in readiness to do aught that might be done, waiting patiently, watching closely, almost silently. If they grieved that they could do so little, their grief was not audible.

More than one there present noticed how downcast some few of these fishermen seemed that day ; but none dreamed that they had other cause for being dispirited than the very natural sympathy they must be feeling for those in danger. Their close watching was approved, their patient waiting commended. Though no boat might be launched in such a sea, yet all else that might be done in readiness to help was done, and with an almost passionate eagerness. And no one was handier in coiling ropes than Samson Verrill ; no one took more trouble to see that the tar-barrels were rightly prepared than Dick Reah. Jim Tyas was more sullen, more restless ; and shook off poor Nan when she went down to the quay with some hot coffee in a can for him,

with a harshness of manner he was never to repent of.

Nan's eyes filled with tears as she turned away ; and others saw and were sorry, even some of the roughest of them felt pain. They knew that Nan was not well just now, and that she had fought her way down to the quay at one of the wildest moments of the gale, with a furious rain beating upon her ; all were things to be remembered afterward—too late.

Yet it was Jim Tyas who improvised the life-line that was to be flung on board the schooner if she came near enough to be helped so ; he it was who kept to the quay and to the Forecliff, while others went home to snatch a hasty meal.

‘He’s noän such a bad ’un after all, isn’t Jim!’ said some of the old fishermen, watching his alertness with a certain pride as in some way belonging to themselves. He was not much liked, he had often made himself to be dreaded, though his temper was rather of the bitter than of the passionate type. Yet he could be violent enough on occasion. He was best known for his daring, his wild

and reckless daring ; courage, one called it ; fool-hardiness, another ; yet none had ever doubted his desperate bravery. More than one man living in the Bight knew well that he owed his life to the eager temerity of Jim Tyas.

They were watching there in the deepening twilight. Groups of sailors and fisher-folk were down on the as yet uncovered beach ; the women and children were for the most part on the quay. There was a carriage or two at the bottom of the hilly road that led down into the Bight from Yarva, and from the moorland townlet of Kildwick. It seemed as if few could rest in their own warm and comfortable homes on such a night as this.

All day Damian Aldenmede had been there. At first he had tried to sketch, to put on canvas the fierce, wild rolling and curving of the waves—waves more dread, more magnificent than any he had ever seen ; but he had soon to desist. It was like trying to make artistic capital of some influence that was appalling, impressing his inmost nature. In a word, he was too greatly overcome by the force of the spirit of the storm to make use of

his talent. He had known nothing like this before.

He could not paint or sketch, he could hardly think to any definite end. What responsive man or woman can ever use the power of thought to any intelligible purpose during a hurricane that is sweeping both land and sea? The least sensitive person must surely be unstrung. The sound alone—the loud, continuous, nerve-wearing, brain-racking sound must of itself be sufficient to untune every string of the chords of human life. And then there is always some dread present, either in the background, or in the forefront of sensation. And it is a strange, peculiar, magnetic kind of dread, for some of us much akin to that which strains the soul when the earth is all a-tremble beneath one's feet. . . . It is only when the storm has ceased, only when the wind lies dead upon land and sea, only when the ocean is stilled to an almost appalling stillness, that one can at all measure the depth of prostration one has reached. If the tension be taken off suddenly the reaction is almost indescribable.

Damian Aldenmede was all unaccustomed

to the strain caused by a storm at the sea's marge. He could not realize it, or understand it altogether, and consequently he gave to other perturbing causes more than their due share in his perturbation.

Twice or thrice during that day he had seen Canon Godfrey in the Bight ; once he had met him coming out from the cottage where the poor little shipwrecked lad was lying, conscious now of the fact that he had been left fatherless, and, since his captain was gone and his shipmates, almost friendless. The Canon grasped the artist's hand warmly, hurriedly. 'We must look to the little stranger,' he said, passing on to the next cottage, where an old woman, mother of one of the drowned Burrell family, was sitting alone, stunned, tearless, resentful, waiting for someone to listen to her raving against the ways of God and man. No such task had ever had to be met by Hugh Godfrey as that which fell to him under the low red roof of the Burrells.

The long, gray, stormy twilight, how it seemed to linger that evening ! The groups of anxious people gathered and grew ; the

great waves rose, and tossed, and fell in long, whitening lines upon the beach. The little schooner was still struggling bravely, but ah ! how slowly, toward the land where alone was safety.

And now once again the Canon and Damian Aldenmede met; it was at the point where the road that crossed the Forecliff joined the path that led to the new promenade. There was a tiny wooden bridge across the beck that ran down from the moors above to the sea. Close at hand a coastguardsman's cottage stood behind trim garden palings. Some fisher-folk were grouped about the little gate, the gray road that led up the hill behind was lined on either hand by people seeking the slight shelter afforded by the rising ground. Everywhere the same subdued excitement was noticeable.

‘What do you think?’ the artist was asking. ‘What do you think of the chances of the schooner? Is there any hope for . . .’

Mr. Aldenmede's question was never finished. There was a sudden commotion among the little crowd by the coastguardsman's gate; a stepping aside as if to make way; a

murmur of consternation ; a white figure flying down the dark road ! The Canon turned in instant anxiety, and the artist's sympathy was with him. Then, all at once, as if Thorhilda had known where her uncle must be, she flew to him, clinging to his arm with pathetic fervour of tenderness.

‘Is it you? *Is it* Uncle Hugh?’ she cried, gasping between each word, being so very breathless. ‘Is Hartas with you? . . . Is he? . . . Surely he is?’

She could say no more just then, and the Rector, seeing how it was with her, placed her arm within his own, and drew her away from the gaping little crowd that had gathered round.

‘Come with me,’ he said gently. ‘Come into Mackenzie’s cottage. . . . Aldenmede, will you see if Mrs. Mackenzie has come home?’

CHAPTER XXX.

NAN TYAS AND HER TROUBLES.

‘Let not the waters close above my head,
Uphold me that I sink not in this mire :
For flesh and blood are frail and sore afraid ;
And young I am, unsatisfied and young,
With memories, hopes, with cravings all unfed,
My song half-sung, its sweetest notes unsung,
All plans cut short, all possibilities.’

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

THUS invited, the artist was well content to accompany them, to see Miss Theyn seated by the cottage fire, trying to collect herself, to overcome her emotion ; but it was evident that these things were difficult to her.

‘Have you not seen Hartas ?’ she asked, still speaking with effort. ‘*He is missing !* He has not been at home all day, all night ! Some time yesterday he left the Grange, and they have not seen him since ! . . . Rhoda is at the Rectory, with Aunt Milicent. . . . She

has walked all the way from the Grange alone and in this storm to see if we could tell her anything about him. . . . Poor Rhoda, she cares so much more about him than I ever dreamed she did. . . . She guessed when I was there yesterday that I had something particular to say to him. As I told you, he was out; but I ought to have gone before. . . . I ought to have done something. *I was asked to warn him!* . . . And I did not. . . . How shall I bear it?—*how shall I bear?* . . . What can they have done, those enemies of his?

‘You know nothing more than you told me of before?’ the Canon asked. ‘You told me that Nan Tyas had intimated that some harm was intended him; you know no more?’

‘I know nothing but that. Surely it is enough. And I did not forget—not for a second. But I wanted to see Hartas *alone*, to talk to him a little, that is, to appeal to him. . . . You have not seen him since——’

‘Not since that moment I told you something of—the moment when we parted on the sands, and he gave me such hope of his future.’

It was strange how the Canon’s heart sank,

remembering that hour. Of this he did not speak, but for a moment he left the room. Thorhilda had seen that the blue, kindly eyes were bright with unshed tears.

She made a momentary effort. ‘*You* have not seen my brother, Mr. Aldenmede, I need hardly ask?’ she said.

Then, worn out by physical fatigue, by mental strain, she closed her eyes and sank back in her chair; and he saw by the dread pallor on her face that she was unconscious. The sight was strangely overwhelming, almost paralysing.

‘My child! *my child!*’ he exclaimed, in a subdued, agonizing tone, as he took her cold hands in his and chafed them. It was only a moment or two before consciousness began to return. Her colour came back with a sudden betraying flush. Had she heard? And what exactly had he said? He hardly knew. Canon Godfrey was re-entering the little room; Mrs. Mackenzie was coming with a cup of tea; Miss Theyn, recovering herself, was asking:

‘What can we do? . . . Uncle Hugh, you will do *something?* for my sake you will do

something. I feel as if it were all on my head, on my own head. Remember that. I ought to have made more effort, but I did not dream of anything happening yet ; how should I ? And now it may be too late—it may be ! . . . What *can* we do ?

‘ There are some things to be done at once,’ the Canon replied, with peremptoriness. ‘ You must, in the first place, take this tea. . . . You have acted with sufficient unwisdom for one day, Thorda dear. The carriage could have been brought round in ten minutes, and in the end you would have been here much sooner. Now you must please obey me. Mr. Aldenmede will get a cab ; he will take you home in it, and then he will come back, and help me to do all that may be done. . . . You see I am counting upon you in a very cavalier fashion,’ he added, turning to Aldenmede. ‘ But this is no time for deliberate courtesies. . . . I need not ask if you will do all you can ?’

The artist was not one to deal in words at such a moment.

‘ I will do all I may do, and gladly,’ he replied. But the restrained, eager fervidness of

his tone said more than many eloquent phrases.

It was about this time that somehow, no one ever knew exactly how, the news was flashed about Ulvstan Bight that Hartas Theyn was missing ; that he had been missing since the previous day. . . . This was Miss Theyn's motive for flying all the way from Yarburgh Rectory on a stormy evening with only a white shawl for protection. The sensation seemed to mingle itself with that that was gathering about the little schooner that was struggling to reach the Bight with her crew of four exhausted men—each man now lashed to the rigging. Once, about an hour earlier, a flash had been seen ; the dull boom of a signal gun had struck upon the ears of the waiting, helpless, saddened crowd. That was the last effort, the last appeal. And no answer could be made—*none*. There was no lifeboat in that little bay.

Had a boat been there, there were fifty men from whom a crew of twelve might have been chosen.

Surely all the people of the neighbourhood must now have been there by the sea's wild

margin ! Gray-headed men and women, who had lived by the sea, and toiled by it, and suffered by it ; little children, whose brief life was all bound up with the sea-life of the place ; young men, strong, anxious, eager to fight for the lives of these men, their fellows, bound helplessly there in the rigging of the drifting ship, yet having no means of fighting ; young maidens excited by sympathy, prayerful, tearful, calm, hysterical—all these and others were there ; emotion mingling with emotion ; thoughts, hopes, regrets, repentance finding expression in that unwonted moment that might have remained unexpressed for ever in the routine of daily existence.

The twilight yet lingered ; the tide was not yet at its highest. The little vessel, with her black hull, could be seen quite distinctly as she tossed there in the white surf. She yet held together, and she was beating in ; these were the sole grounds for hoping.

Intense as were the hopes, the fears, that held that multitude of people in a common thrall, the news that the Rector's niece had brought to the Bight was by no means ignored. All at once the feeling that some dark

deed had been perpetrated seemed to seize the people. No one knew how this idea had arisen, yet it was there; and almost immediately spoken of more or less openly.

'*They've* done it—them Andoes,' old Dan Furniss said at once. 'Ne'er a worse woman lived nor old Suze, an' they're all of a breed, 'cept David; an' he's like anuff a changlin', whoä knows? Wi' such a family as yon—whoä knows? But that's neither here nor there! What ha' they done wi' the young Squire? *He's* nöan sa much, or he'd never ha' set his heart on a flither-picker! But for all that they're scarce within the law o' the land i' murderin' him! . . . An' whoä knows?'

Such were the words, the hints, the suggestions, that flew round the Bight on that wild autumn evening.

Did they hear, those three men who had rowed out to sea the night before, towing a tiny boat which they had cut adrift miles from the land?

Did they need to hear any spoken word? Was not the voice of the stormy sea as it rolled and broke and thundered at the foot

of the cliffs—was not this sufficiently informing ?

Who can say what it was that was lending such desperation to their effort to save life—the lives of those comparative strangers that fate was driving into their hands ?

As everyone saw, the men of Ulvstan were doing their utmost. A tar-barrel had been lighted on the beach, indicating the spot toward which the schooner's crew might aim with some hope of deliverance—supposing any power of aiming anywhere were left to them. Very soon after this it was perceived that they had abandoned themselves to the mercy of wind and wave.

The gun had been fired at sea ; the burning tar-barrel had answered on the shore ; and now out upon the Balderstone—a long, dark tongue of low-lying rock that stretched across the bay at a right angle from the cliff, some fifty men and lads of the place were assembled, a few with ropes, a few with flares of blazing pitch or tar. They were all anxious, all ready, a few pressed forward in a very passion of desperate eagerness.

It was just then that Nan Tyas and Bab

Burdas met unexpectedly on a shelving part of the Forecliff. Nan was sobbing, shivering, trying to cover herself with a little red woollen handkerchief that was about her neck. Bab saw and understood, and was all compassion in a moment.

‘Ya daft lass!’ she exclaimed, unfastening her own big warm Scotch plaid, and pinning it in motherly fashion about the young fish-wife’s shoulders. ‘Ya daft body! What are ya doin’ here? You’ve no right to be out o’ doors at all! One’ll hear tell o’ ya bein’ i’ bed the next thing!’

Nan’s first answer was a deeper sob; then at last words came.

‘Eh, but you’re a good friend, Bab, an’ kind! As for stayin’ indoors, it’s noän sa easy at a time like this!’

‘You’re gettin’ nervous, Nan, an’ no wonder! What’s your mother about ’at she’s not lookin’ after ya?’

‘My mother!’ Nan exclaimed, checking her tears for the moment, and lifting her face with a look of scorn upon it. ‘My mother! . . . Eh, well, she *is* my mother, so mebbe I’d better say no more; but it’s little ya

know o' her if ya think she'd put herself oot o' the way for me. . . . If I thought I'd ever live to be as hard to a bairn o' mine, I'd wish to die to-night, afore to-morrow. . . . But what am I sayin' ? She *is* my mother !'

'Don't say no more of her, Nan—not just now,' Bab urged gently and kindly. 'You're noän dependent on her now. . . . Surely Jim's kind anuff ?'

Bab had no idea of being inquisitive. She was only wondering how far she need go in case of Nan being in any trouble or danger.

For awhile Nan did not reply. Then she said sadly and slowly :

'Off an' on he's kind ; there's worse nor he is.'

It was evident that she wished to say no more ; and Bab understood and was silent in her compassion, but she drew a little nearer to Nan, and watched her in the motherly protecting way that was an instinct always, when anyone needed her care. Nan was well able to appreciate kindness.

And still the storm seemed to be increasing. The few stars that had appeared in the sky

were obscured, the heavens became one black mass of cloud, and suddenly from out the mass there came a vivid, blinding flash of lightning, disclosing the scene in the Bight with painful clearness. The schooner was still there, her dark hull rocking slowly in the white waves, her masts still standing, and apparently two at least of the crew had descended from the rigging. The crowd of men were still clustering upon the tongue of rock : some of them seemed quite near the ship. In point of fact, they were holding a difficult conversation with the master and mate of the *Lady Godiva*. The lightning flash silenced the speakers for the moment.

Then came the thunder, loud, dread, long-continued, seeming as if it silenced all things.

‘ You *mun* go home, Nan ! ’ Bab urged again, her sympathy roused to the uttermost by the uncontrollable tremor of the girl at her side. ‘ You’re none well ! You *mun* go home.’

‘ Let ma wait a bit longer—just a bit,’ Nan begged with a new quietness, a new gentleness. ‘ I’d like to see what comes o’ yon schooner.’

CHAPTER XXXI.

‘AT MIDNIGHT, WHEN THE CRY WAS MADE.’

“ Love me in sinners and in saints,
In each who needs or faints,—
Lord, I will love Thee as I can
In every brother man.

“ All sore, all crippled, all who ache,
Tend all for My dear sake,—
All for Thy sake, Lord : I will see
In every sufferer Thee.”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

It was just at that moment that old Ephraim Burdas came up to the point of the Forecliff where Barbara and Nan were standing. Bab saw at once that he was somewhat excited, and longing to unburden himself of the cause of his excitement.

‘What’s i’ the wind noo, gran’father?’ she asked. ‘What have ya heerd that’s new? Nought ’at’s good such a day as this, I’m fearin’.’

‘Good or bad—whoä can sääy?’ exclaimed the old man. ‘Think ov a laädy like yon, dressed all i’ white, fra the crown of her head te the sole of her foot, flyin’ doon fra Yarburch Rectory, all aleän, an’ wi’ niver a hat nor a bonnet on her heäd! Think on it! An’ a storm like this ragin’—wind an’ rään, an’ thunder an’ leetnin’, an’ slush an’ mud—think on it! An’ what’s she done it for? All acause yon scapegrace brother of hers is missin’. Missin’? Neä doobt on it; an’ missin’ he’ll be! Missin’? Some o’ them Andoes could tell what sort o’ missing it means. They’re bad anuff for owght—all but Dave; an’ as for Jim Tyas. . . .’

‘*Gran’father!*’ Bab exclaimed warmly, feeling the heavy weight of poor Nan, as the young fishwife reeled and fell against her. For all Bab’s strength it was as much as she could do to sustain the half-conscious form. She had no time or opportunity to realize the stun and hurt that the old man’s words had been to her own brain. But almost immediately Nan made a great effort—there was need for it—and recovered herself sufficiently to say:

'Keep a quiet tongue i' yer head, Barbie. I'll tell ya what Ah know ; it isn't much, but I'll tell ya by-an'-by.'

That was all Nan could say just then ; and she spoke the truth in saying that she did not know much.

One thing everybody knew. Dandy Will's little boat had been missed at daybreak ; but that such a tiny craft should have broken from its moorings and drifted out to sea during such a night as that just passed was far too commonplace a matter to attract much remark. Why had not the owner taken the trouble to do what the owners of other boats had done—draw his little possession up to the side of the Forecliff, and turn her upside-down among the grass and the gray-green bents ? Who could pity him ?

Perhaps it was fortunate for Bab that she had Nan to think of and care for in this first moment. Still she began to feel as if her own strength were being taken from her ; as if she must be growing cold and white and ill. Miss Theyn was there in the Bight ? Her brother Hartas was missing ? People were suspecting foul play ? Surely her little

world was crumbling beneath her feet! Yes, certainly it was well that Bab had to give the best energy she had left to the suffering girl by her side.

‘You’ll go home now, Nan!’ she said entreatingly. But Nan was not yet to be persuaded.

‘Hoo ya talk!’ she replied, with the mingled tremor of cold and fear and pain in her voice. ‘Go home, an’ him doon there, bent o’ riskin’ his life as he were never bent afore! *It’s been on him all day, that desperateness!* . . . Eh me! it’s been the strangest day o’ my life—the strangest of all. . . . God send Ah may never know such another!’

Sobs prevented Nan’s utterance of any further foreboding. By this time the lightning was flashing across the bay with some frequency, the thunder rolling and crashing with appalling nearness; the white waves were still flying and tossing down below.

Every now and then the schooner could be seen; the long dark Balderstone, with a few men yet remaining upon it, lingering there because of their humane errand. There were not more than five or six of them now:

the rest had fled with the rising of the tide, warning the others that the deep gutter that surrounded the rock was already filled with water. Jim Tyas and Samson Verrill were among those who remained, beseeching the crew of the *Lady Godiva* to leave the vessel while yet there was time.

Again Jim Tyas was the spokesman. He knew the captain of the little ship, knew that he was part owner as well as captain, and he knew also that, for economy's sake, she had not been insured. If she were lost that night, left to the mercy of the wild waters of Ulvstan Bight, all was lost so far as Jonas Lee was concerned. He would be a penniless man. His crew knew this, and held by their captain bravely.

‘There's no more nor five minutes noo!’ Jim Tyas urged, apparently moved by such urgent compassion as had never moved him before. ‘Give us a rope! We'll land the lot on ya i' less time nor it's ta'en us to talk of it.’

The captain shook his head; being an old man his voice could hardly be heard above the roar of that wild storm; and the rest of

the crew made no reply. They were free to do as they would, and their freedom might have meant their death-warrant had fate so willed it.

A few more words passed between the men on the shuddering vessel and those who would save them even from their own self-sacrifice. Then all at once a cry was heard, the cry of men suddenly, wildly despairing. One of the five fishermen who had stayed on the Balderstone discovered all at once that their sole chance of escape was cut off. They were surrounded by the rising tide. A rush was made; the men on the deck of the schooner, exhausted as they were, fired another flare, as if to help the fishermen who were making that desperate rush through the tossing, hurling waves.

‘Follow me!’ Jim Tyas shouted, as he dashed foremost into the surf at the one point whence escape might be possible. And the men followed him. Again, in the middle of the narrow channel, they heard his voice. It sounded strange and faint and heavy, yet the word was encouraging. ‘Follow me!’

And they did follow him, through the fierce, fatal, narrow sea, but not to his doom.

Whether he had struck his head upon some point of rock, or whether some piece of floating wreck had struck him, none knew, none ever might know.

When Jim Tyas washed up, as he did within half an hour of his leaving the Balderstone, he was bruised and hurt, and cold and dead.

They dared not tell Nan the truth—no one ever did tell her. She saw it in the look of the men who had escaped so hardly from the rocky peninsula, and who came up to the Forecliff with torn and bleeding hands, with white and ghastly faces, with dripping hair and clothing, and the smell of the salt seaweed about them everywhere.

Nan met them, looked upon them—there were four where five had been. All her questioning was in that one look. She turned away silently, quite quietly. Only Barbara Burdas turned with her.

'Come wi' me, Nan, come home wi' me. You'll be quieter there nor anywhere else. . . . An' there's noän i' the world 'll do better by ya. Say you'll come!'

Nan made no reply, but she permitted her-

self to be led away, Bab's arm round her, Bab's soothing word in her ear.

All that night Bab had no thought of herself, of her own strange grief. How should she? Dr. Douglas came and went; old Hagar Furniss came and stayed. Suzie Andoe refused to come, and Nan never asked for her. She asked for nothing, for no one. She made no moan.

It was some time about midnight when her baby was born—a fine, fair woman-child as any mother need wish to look upon.

But it was evident that poor Nan's heart sank still lower, hearing what was said.

‘Don’t say it’s a girl, Barbie, *don’t*. I’d liefer you’d say it were dead-born nor tell me it’s a girl! . . . Poor folk should niver ha’ nowt but lads. . . . They can fight their own waäy, lads can! They’ve less to suffer. . . . Nobody niver dreams o’ what women has to go through, when they’re poor, oh, God, no! . . . Does God Hisself know o’ what women bears—an’ nobody to ’give em a thought; nobody to make nought no easier for ’em? . . . Does He know? . . . If He does, why doesn’t He put it into the hearts o’

rich folk to think, to help a bit? . . . They could do such a lot! Oh, do they iver think o' what they could do? . . . Why doesn't He make 'em think? . . . Why a' easier bed, a softer pilla', a better blanket, a few better bits of under-things for one's sel' an' for the bairn, they'd all make a difference, a strange difference. . . . Not 'at I've aught to complain on noo, no; but that's your doin', Barbie. . . . Gie me a kiss! . . . You'll be as good to the little un as ya've been to me?

'Nannie, be still!' Barbara sobbed, kissing the dying woman as she spoke. But Bab did not dream that death was near. She sat on the edge of her own little bed where Nan lay; all was quiet, and clean, and warm. The doctor had gone, saying that he would return presently; and Hagar Furniss shook her old head wisely when she heard this, saying nothing of her fear to Bab. It was poor Nan herself who first awoke the dread that was slumbering in Barbara's brain.

'Gie me a word,' Nan whispered after a brief silence. 'I'll sleep quieter under the sod if ya'll say one word. You'll be a mother to the little un!'

‘*Me* be a mother to her!’ Bab said, restraining herself. ‘But where’s the good o’ talking to-night, when you’re sa down? You’ll be a mother to her yersel.’

‘Then ya’ll noän promise, Barbara?’

‘Promise! What need o’ promise, Nan? D’ya think ’at I’d ever see the bairn want so long as I’d bite or sup for mysel’?’ Then she put out her hand, and took Nan’s chill fingers in her own. ‘Be at rest,’ she said. ‘If the little un ever wants any mother but you, I’ll be proud to take your place. . . . Eh, me! Anybody ’ud be proud of a bairn like this. Why there’s princesses ’ud give a thousand pound to hev one like it! . . . Be at rest about her, Nan.’

The poor girl smiled faintly, opened her eyes, in which there was a new, soft, strange light, and clasped Barbara’s hand more strongly and warmly in her own.

‘It is good o’ ya, Barbara, it is good! But you were allus like that, allus so different fra me. . . . Ah’ve never been good mysel’, though Dave’s said so much, an’ tried so hard. . . . But Ah wasn’t like him—no, never. . . . Will Ah be forgiven, d’ya think?’

‘The Bible says so, if ya’re sorry.’

‘Ah’m sorry enough *noo*. . . . Ah’ve often been sorry when Ah couldn’t say so. . . . An’ Ah doänt know how to sääy noa prayers nor nothing. . . . Could you sääy one—a prayer, Barbie? Ah’d like ya to, if ya can. . . . But afore ya do, will ye sääy again ’at ya won’t forsake the little lass? . . . If ever they take her fra ya, her father’s folk, ya won’t forget her?’

‘*Me forget!* . . . What’s the girl thinking on? . . . Hevn’t Ah said ’at ya were to set yer mind at rest?’

Barbara was still sitting on the edge of the bed ; the chill hand of the dying mother was still clasped in her own strong and warm one. But even yet Barbara did not dream that the end was near. Strange to say she had never witnessed the oncoming of the last enemy save in that hour when her father and mother had struggled with him in the deep waters of Ulvstan Bight. Now all was different.

Bab thought awhile, praying silently with closed eyes, then a few tremulous and reverent words came audibly. Nan was comforted.

Presently she spoke again :

‘I’m still thinkin’ o’ the little lass,’ she said. ‘It’s a strange thought mebbe, but I *would* like ta call her after yon lady—her ya think so much on! . . . Would she take it badly, d’ya think?’

‘Take it badly! None her! . . . She’ll be ever sa proud to know ya wish it.’

‘Then will ya tell her?’

‘Ay, or you’ll tell her yourself.’

‘No ; Ah’ll noän do that, not now. . . .’ Then there came a pause. Old Hagar was dozing by the crackling fire, the clock ticked loudly. Presently Nan spoke again :

‘Barbie! . . . Ah’ll noän live till the mornin’,’ she said slowly and feebly. ‘Ah’m dying noo. . . . Ah know Ah’m dying! Give me another kiss. . . . An’ be good to the little lass. . . . An’ Barbie, say that prayer again. . . . Ah’d like ya te be sayin’ that just when Ah go. Ah’d like ya te be speakin’ a word for me then! ’Twould go wi’ me like. . . . Ah’d not seem to be sa lone—not . . . not sa despert lone!’

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONJECTURE VAGUE.

‘ Strew on her roses, roses,
And never a spray of yew !
In quiet she reposes ;
Ah, would that I did too !’

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

It is strange, recalling the story of the sea, to remember how often desperate effort has been made, lifeboats launched, rockets fired, men’s lives sacrificed, in the desire to aid some ship’s crew, while afterward that crew have been able calmly to leave their stranded vessel, to walk ashore without danger or difficulty. It is strange, and it is sad ; yet no human forethought may avert such sad-seeming incidents.

It happened thus, precisely thus, to the crew of the *Lady Godiva*. They clung to their vessel, and about three o’clock on the

following morning they descended from the side to the beach as if no very extraordinary escape had been theirs. It even seemed to some matter for congratulation that only one life was lost in connection with the wreck of the schooner, and that the life of a man not too highly respected or too greatly beloved.

Yet the death of Jim Tyas made sensation enough on the Forecliff, and far beyond ; and that the poor girl-wife should have laid down her life with his did not make the sensation less. The child, left so solemnly to Bab Burdas, would have been a cause of curiosity had Bab permitted ; but she did not, and, as old Mrs. Andoe said, in an aggrieved tone—
' Nobody daures say "wrong does she do" !'

As a matter of course, Bab had admitted old Suzie to see her little grandchild, and the child's dead mother. Suzie had wept, knelt, prayed, wept again, and thanked Bab almost abjectly for her goodness.

Barbara stood strong, and silent, and pale, dreading the next event ; but there was not much need for dread.

' You must say once for all what you mean to do, Susan,' Bab began, speaking even more

gravely and weightily than was her wont. 'I've told you what she said, her that's lying there on my own pillow. I've repeated what she said almost with her last breath, an' I've told you my own wish an' all. But for all that, you're the bairn's grandmother, an' the mother o' her 'at's lyin' there. So speak, but let it be once for all. D'ya want to take the child, te bring it up as you've brought up most o' yer own—i' rags, i' misery, i' dirt, i' hunger, i' ignorance, i' wickedness? I'm noän sparin' you, as mebbe I ought to ha' done, seein' as yer hair's gray, an' yer head tremblin'. But I've no patience with you—I never had. . . . Still, if yer bent on takin' the bairn fra me, take it! I'll none forget it, for *her* sake. But if you've ony regard for *her* last word, you'll leave it here, where it lies.'

Another gush of ready tears was the first answer, and Bab, not being trained to refinement of humanity, turned away impatiently. Then all at once her conscience troubled her. She would have spoken again, and more kindly, but Susan prevented her.

'Deiä as ya will, Bab; deiä as ya will! What could Ah mak' of a little wrecklin' like

yon at this tahme o' daäy? . . . Naäy, Ah can noän be bothered wi' it. . . . Ah'd get noä sleep of a night, nowther me nor Pete. We're ower oäd te take a new-born bairn! Deä as ya will, Bab. Ah'll niver goä agaäin ya !

'You promise? . . . You won't take the child away fra me when I've got her beyond bein' a burden?'

'Noö. Ah'd noän do that, Bab. . . . You're hard, so they all say ; you're hard when ya *do* tak' agaäin onybody. . . . But you're good to children, they alloo that. It's such as Dave you're hard wiv, an' such as yon son o' the Squire's. . . . Eh, hoo'ivver can ya rest i' the hoose, an know, . . . naäy, what is Ah sayin'? Ya know nowt—nobody does—that's the worst on't. It 'ud noän seem sa bad if onybody knew.'

All at once Bab's attention had been arrested. She had turned so as to face old Susan, watching her closely, almost fiercely.

'Nobody *does* know, ya say? That's a lie—a downright lie! Ya know yerself!'

It was in vain the old woman denied, protested, shuffled, wept, denied again. The

more she protested, the less Bab believed her.

‘Now look here, Suzie,’ Bab said at last. ‘If ya don’t tell me all ya know about young Theyn, I go straight this very hour to Dr. Douglas an’ tell him what *I* know, what I know about the watch that Miss Douglas lost on the sands two years agone. . . . Oh, don’t look sa startled ; ya know all about that !’

Poor old Suzie ! She could hardly be said to turn pale, but the smoke-brown tint of her face yielded to a mingled green and yellow ; her lips dropped apart, her eyes stared angrily.

‘A watch ! . . . What are ya talkin’ on, Bab ? Are ya daft to-night ? What are ya meanin’ ?’

‘Ah’m noän one to waste words !’ Bab replied curtly. ‘You know what I mean ! . . . You know what I’m going to do—that is, unless ya tell me what they’ve done to—to him ya spoke of—Squire Theyn’s son ! . . . Tell the truth, an’ *all* the truth, or I start for Yarburgh within five minutes.’

It was of no avail that the old woman

denied all knowledge of the matter Barbara spoke of. She had to disclose all she knew; indeed, all she conjectured at last. It was not much; but Bab was satisfied that no more was to be extracted.

‘Ah can only guess,’ the poor old fishwife said. ‘I heerd a word, only a word; ’twas poor Jim spoke it. An’ then somebody said as how Dandy Will’s little boat were missin’, an’ Ah couldn’t but put two an’ two together. . . . An’ noo, if ya tell o’ ma, they’ll murther ma, as sure as Ah’m stannin’ here! But ya won’t, Bab; Ah know ya won’t. . . . Ya were never one o’ the leaky sort!’

Bab’s heart was palpitating; her eyes seemed blinded with a mist, not of tears, but certainly of emotion. Though Susan had done no more than confirm poor Nan’s word, the confirmation was more than Bab could easily bear then.

The storm was still raging, the wind was howling round the little cottage, wailing in the chimney, beating at the door, shuddering at the window. Even there, in the middle of the Forecliff, the sound of the sea thundering at the foot of the cliffs, breaking upon the

shore, booming, as it were, in the very ears of those who listened, and of those who would fain cease from listening—even there the violence of the storm seemed sufficiently appalling. What must it be out at sea? What *could* it be to any man exposed to the worst?—on the deck of a ship for instance, or lashed in the rigging, as those had been lashed in the Bight below. That any man should be out in such a storm in a small boat and live was an idea to be mocked at, if any had heart for such mockery.

Bab had stood by her own fireside, silent for a while; but at last she spoke:

‘Ya can go noo, Suzie,’ she said at last, speaking gently enough now. ‘The funeral ’ll be the day after to-morrow. The rector’s been here, an’ he says Miss Theyn’s goin’ to tak’ all the expense hersel’. Ah’ll let *her* do it; I wouldn’t ha let nobody else. . . . It may be a bit o’ satisfaction to her. She’ll ha’ trouble anuff now. . . . She cared for *him*—him ’at they’ve done to death oot o’ spite. . . . An’ now go, Susan. . . . An’ if ya can fetch any news—news o’ him—I’ll pay ya as ya

niver was paid for no piece o' work since you were born. . . . Remember that.'

Susan Andoe had hardly left the door of the cottage on the Forecliff, when Bab, a little to her surprise, saw two other figures approaching—an elderly, worn, sorrowful-looking man, and a young girl wrapped in a gray cloak, with the hood drawn over her head in place of hat or bonnet, a wise enough arrangement on such a day.

Intuitively Bab recognised Squire Theyn and his younger daughter; and when the old man knocked at the door Bab was at least as white, as much overcome by emotion, as Rhoda herself was. She listened to the Squire's questions—questions put briefly, calmly, and with dignity, and she answered with a dignity at least equal to that she heard.

'I know but little, but very little, sir,' she replied. The wind was shaking the door so violently that she could hardly hold it, hardly hear herself speak. 'What I do know I'll tell ya if ya come into the house.'

'That I will *not* do,' the Squire replied.

‘How can you ask it? . . . Tell me what you know about my son.’

Bab grew so pale that even Rhoda grew pitiful.

‘If you know anything, *do* tell us,’ Rhoda urged in her hoarse low-pitched voice. There was trouble in it, as Bab heard.

In very few words Barbara told the Squire what she had gathered, what she feared. This she did without betraying either the dead or the living.

Squire Theyn listened, looked into the face of the girl who was speaking with a dazed, wondering look, as if he hardly understood. Then he turned away, stunned, silent. For above an hour he went on silently over the cliff-top ways; and Rhoda, walking beside him, had no heart to break that sad silence.

Then, apparently awakening to her presence all at once, he turned quickly, but not savagely, as the child half-expected.

‘Go home, Rhoda,’ he said, speaking gently enough; ‘go home at once. . . . You can’t walk all the way back to Garlaff. Take Skipton’s cab. . . . Here’s the money to pay for it.’

‘Come with me,’ the girl ventured to say, unwonted tears in her eyes. ‘Don’t stay here, father, don’t. . . . What can you do?’

The Squire was not angry, nay, he was touched more than he knew; but no thought of yielding came to him.

‘Do as I said, Rhoda; go home. I’ll come by-an’-by.’

The Squire turned away, but slowly and sadly rather than impatiently; and Rhoda, going back by the Bight came suddenly upon Canon Godfrey and Mrs. Kerne in earnest conversation with David Andoe. But David knew very little more than they did, though perhaps he feared more. He was about to express his worst fear, when Mrs. Kerne discerned Rhoda coming down the pathway that led from the cliff. She saw that the girl was alone and in tears. Mrs. Kerne’s own face was not free from the sign of weeping.

‘Hush!’ she said imperatively; ‘say no more now.’

Then she turned to her niece with a kindness, a sympathy that caused poor Rhoda to break down altogether. If her Aunt Kathe-

rine could be so gentle, so affectionate as this, things must be looking very dark indeed. Rhoda's distress increased her aunt's attempt to relieve it; and presently they all went together to Laburnum Villa, the beautiful new house that Mr. Kerne had built out beyond the promenade. Tea was ordered, gas lighted everywhere, fires stirred to a blaze; but Mrs. Kerne's tears were more than all her hospitalities in her niece's sight. People who have wept together are friendlier friends than before.

When Rhoda went home, her uncle went with her in the cab, and did his best to comfort her.

'Don't give up hoping,' the Canon said, understandingly; 'don't do that. Will it help you to know that I, for my part, feel something that is almost certainty that I have not looked my last upon the face of your brother Hartas? . . . I won't say too much; but I will repeat what I have said in other words. I have not yet for one moment felt hopeless.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WATCHING BY THE SEA.

‘ Just Heaven instructs us with an awful voice,
That Conscience rules us e’en against our choice,
Our inward monitress to guide or warn,
If listened to,—but, if repelled with scorn,
At length as dire Remorse, she reappears,
Works in our guilty hopes and selfish fears.
Still bids Remember ! and still cries, Too late !
And while she scares us, goads us to our fate.’

COLERIDGE.

ALL alone the old Squire walked there on the wind-swept cliff-top—the thundering of the ocean at the foot of the cliffs in his ear, the far white wide sea filling all his sight. Night was closing in again ; the storm had not abated. Men’s fears were not yet at rest.

Some there were who had especial cause for fear. Dick Reah, not able to bear the sight of the little inn after the inquiry, during which he had been called upon to

give evidence as to the death of Jim Tyas, had escaped from the place altogether, taking up his quarters at Danesborough. Sampey Verrill took a different view of the matter, and was not by any entreaty of wife or child to be drawn from walking to and fro by the edge of the still stormy sea. At high water, when he might walk there no longer, he took his stand on a rugged point of blue-black rock to the south of the Bight, and remained there till the tide had turned. He might not escape from that drear watch-point if he would, till the receding sea gave him permission.

They did not know of each other, these two lonely watchers. All night the Squire walked up and down to the north of the Bight; all night Samson Verrill sat or stood on the point of rock to the south, within a few feet of the sea that was still tossing wildly, madly, eagerly, as if no cry of lamentation were going up from the little bay for the deaths it had already caused.

At daybreak three of the drowned Burrells were found lying on the shore—the father was there, his eldest son, and the youngest. They

were taken home, and a day or two later they were laid to rest in the old churchyard. You may see the tombstone now, with the date and manner of their death told in brief words. It is all the biography of men who lived brave lives, and died sad deaths, and it is told in some five or six lines cut with a graver's tool.

This is the conclusion:

“Through many various tempests have we past,
But a safe harbour we have found at last.”

It was David Andoe who found the youngest Burrell lying among the weed-covered stones to the north of the bay. David was sauntering over the beach, hoping to meet Samson Verrill, to get the truth from him as to what had become of Squire Theyn's son. David could not yet quite believe the tale that was spreading everywhere now; yet he feared that Sampey knew whether it were true or no. How else could his strange conduct be accounted for? Why should he be wandering about among the rocks by night and by day, only going home for a few moments at a time to snatch a little food

between the tides? Surely Samson knew something, and David was fain to learn what he knew.

But when at last opportunity came, he could extract no details. Samson would acknowledge nothing, deny nothing.

‘For the sake o’ yon old man, *his* father, as is wandering about yon cliffs—for his sake tell me the truth, Sampey.’

So David urged; but the truth did not come.

‘If the Squire’s watchin’, let him watch. I’d noän hinder him!’

That was all that Samson Verrill would say. But he turned back to his own watching, and David could hardly fail to fear the worst.

Another night passed, the storm continued, and at daybreak the ocean seemed *churned*, so to speak, so far did the white surf extend, so entirely one mass of surging foam did it appear to be.

That a small boat should be anywhere on such a sea and not be broken to matchwood seemed an impossibility. The one possible thing was an event not to be thought

of without pain, even by those least concerned.

Hope dies hardly--*how* hardly let those say who have spent not only days but long nights in the endurance of the agony of desperate hoping.

No entreaty prevailed with Squire Theyn. All the first night he had walked there, wind-driven, rain-swept, on the cliff-top. His eyes had looked upon the sea at even, while the last ray of light was dying from the farthest white wave, and his sight swept the same sea when the first ray of morning broke above the eastern horizon, spreading so slowly, so very slowly to the margin of the sea at his feet. And in all that wide stretch of water there was no sail, nor any boat ; there was nothing for the poor old man's wearied gaze to rest upon save the stormy sea itself.

Very weary he was, for the soul within him was already fainting.

'Hartas!' he said, speaking softly, as if he were heard. 'Hartas! forgive me! . . . Forgive me, and come back. . . . I've not been a good father to you, but things shall be different. . . . Only come back!'

When the day was full in the sky he went home and took some food when Rhoda urged him, and rested awhile. But before nightfall he went back to the cliff-top pathway; and when Canon Godfrey, wearied with his day's work, his many visits to the cottages of the bereaved, his ministrations in the churchyard—when the Canon joined the old man, and would have walked with him, he found no response.

‘Leave me—leave me alone!’ the Squire prayed. ‘It is all I ask of any human being now, that I may be left alone!’

On the fourth day the storm went down, but the comparative calm brought no hope to any who believed that Hartas Theyn had been dealt with as the people on the Forecliff were declaring. But little else was talked of in the place now. Dick Reah had never returned from Danesborough. Samson Verrill still went to and fro on the rocks, already a mere shadow of himself; and the sight of the Squire's gray, gaunt figure, going up and down the hillside road in the twilight and at dawn, drew tears from eyes not much accustomed to weeping.

Each day the carriage came down from the Rectory with Mrs. Godfrey in it, and sometimes Mrs. Meredith and her son Percival. Thorhilda did not come.

And none saw Barbara Burdas outside the cottage door during these terrible days. It was understood that she must have enough to do. One day there had been a double funeral, attended by half the people of the Bight. James Grainger Tyas, fisherman, and Ann Eliza, his wife, had been laid side by side in the old churchyard at Yarburgh, on the same day, in the same hour. Bab Burdas was there by the two graves, the three-days' old baby safely sheltered in her arms.

'I'll tell ya on it some day, my bairn,' she whispered through her blinding tears to the little one. 'An' maybe you'll be glad to know I brought you here, . . . that is, if you may ever be glad at all, bein' fatherless an' motherless! . . . But, eh, God helpin' me, you shall never miss them! . . . I'll be father an' mother to you, both i' one!'

That day passed, and then the next. Yet no tidings came of Hartas Theyn.

Rhoda wept at home, growing paler and

thinner ; yet she did her father's bidding, and kept one room ready for anything that might happen, doing all more willingly and gladly than ever before. Even her short-sighted and self-absorbed Aunt Averil marvelled at the change, and had not the human grace to keep her marvelling to herself.

And Bab Burdas wept in the rude house on the Forecliff ; but not when anyone was by to see. Bab's weeping was done when her grandfather and the children were in bed, and Nan's baby lay quietly smiling and sleeping on her lap. . . . It was only then that Bab gave way.

So another day went on — it was the sixth.

And yet another came and went.

Each night Squire Theyn had kept his vigil on the cliff to the north of the Bight of Ulvstan ; and the people saw and wondered. Was the old man going to watch there for ever ? What was he hoping now ? What could he be thinking ?

They could not hear what he still kept saying :

‘Hartas ! Hartas ! forgive me ! Come back,

and forgive me ! I wasn't a good father, but I cared for you. I always cared. . . . Even when you were a little lad, I cared. . . . Come back again !'

At last came the eighth evening — the eighth from that on which three angry and resentful men had sought to express their resentment in a manner not altogether unknown in the annals of Ulvstan Bight. And now one was lying in the churchyard at Yarburgh ; and one was drowning his remorse in drink at Danesborough ; and one was trying in his own dumb and blind way to atone by wandering among the rocks by the edge of that sea that might give up the dead, but could surely never give up the living man to whom that cruel deed had been done.

' Yon Sampey Verrill's losin' his senses, he mun be !'

It was old Hagar Furniss who spoke. She had gone in to help Bab awhile, as she did almost every evening now when her own day's work was done, knowing that nothing she could do for Bab would be unrequited.

The old woman saw at once that some

change had come over Barbara. The girl's face was flushed to a burning crimson ; her eyes bright and restless ; her lips seemed to tremble when she spoke.

‘ Eh, but I’ve looked long for you, Hagar !’ she said eagerly. ‘ I’m wanting you sorely ! Can you stay the night, all night here with the bairn ? Say you can !’

‘ Ah can stay if Ah’m wanted, honey !’ the old woman replied kindly. ‘ What’s wrong ? Naught wi’ the bairn, I hope ?’

‘ No, it’s none her, thank God ! But I’m goin’ out o’ doors. I *must* go. . . . Don’t ask ma no question, Hagar ! Give the little one all she needs, an’ take the best o’ care on her. . . . I must go at once !’

Then, kissing the new-born infant, taking an anxious look at the sleeping children in the next room, at little Ailsie in the room above, Bab went out.

It was dark by this time ; but not entirely dark. There was no moon ; but that wondrous clear, deep starlight so often seen on autumn evenings in the north seemed to glow upon the earth as if some light came from below to meet that from above.

Bab took her way to the north without a thought; going down into the Bight, up the opposite cliff-side, and away out across the cliff-fields. The Squire was there; she passed him silently, tremulously, about a mile and a half beyond the Bight. He too was going northward, but slowly, wearily, hopelessly. A sigh reached Bab's ears as she flew onward—a long sad sigh that was half a groan, and drew the tears from her eyes once more; a very passion of tears—blinding, scalding, not relieving. She felt shattered when the moment was over.

And yet she was not hopeless, not as others were. Had she had no thought that Hartas Theyn was yet alive she had not been there.

Bab was too sensitive to ridicule to have been able to tell anyone about her of the real reason for her present action.

'I could ha' told *her*' ('*her*' meaning always Miss Theyn)—'I could ha' told *her*' at I was moved by a dream. *She* wouldn't ha' laughed at me. *She* wouldn't ha' looked at me as if she thought I was a fool.'

A dream—only a dream; but one so vivid

that all day Bab had lived and moved in the atmosphere of it.

For days past all her thought, all her imagining, had been of the sea, and of what might be happening somewhere out upon it if the things that people were whispering were true ; and almost as a matter of course her dream had been a sea-dream.

She seemed to see it quite plainly, even after she awoke—the wide stormy ocean she knew so well ; and far away in the horizon a boat, a mere dark speck upon a shining floor. And she had known—at once she had known—that in the boat was a solitary man, the man she loved. Then all at once, as things do happen in dreams, she had found herself in the same tiny craft, and there, at her feet, this man dying or fainting. She took the dark, drooping head in her arms, the hair wet with the salt sea-spray, and in her dream she caressed it, in her dream she kissed the pallid lips ; kissed them again and again ; kissed them so passionately that once more life, dear life, breathed through them.

And with this breath of another's life on her lip she awoke.

This was why Bab was out upon the cliff-top that calm star-lit night; this was why she remained there, waiting to see what might come to pass.

She no more came so near to the Squire, though she knew of his presence there. Always she remained a little farther to the north, receding when he advanced. Her instinct toward self-effacement in all things had developed rapidly of late. It was a certain sign of other developments. Only the coarser soul desires to be aggressively *en évidence*.

Long after midnight Bab watched there. She thought often of the old man behind; of what his sorrow must be, his longing, his weariness, his despair. Her heart yearned toward him; for another's sake, perhaps, still the yearning was tender and true. If only she might have spoken to him; if only she might have dared to comfort him with the hope that still lingered in her own heart!

So the night went on—that long, drear, silent night.

At last the dawn broke; a soft, pink-gray dawn above a soft, pink-gray sea.

Slowly the faint pink deepened to rose

colour; slowly the rose-tint spread across the wide, far distance.

Then, presently, above the pure rose-red, a glowing gold gleamed through the shining edge of each ascending cloud; pearl-gray shadows subdued the amber and the rose into one lovely harmony of colour; the sea took up each note and repeated it; while overhead, even now, the stars were fading one by one from the night-toned ether of deepest blue. Bab had seen many sunrises, but none had moved her as she was moved now.

She was standing on the farthest point of the big brown point called Scarclyff Nab, tremulous, hopeful, admiring, despairing, expectant; above all, expectant. Every moment the scene about her seemed to reproduce more closely the scene of the vision she had had.

Expectant! Yes, her very soul seemed to tremble within her as her quick sight swept the sea-leagues of the wide horizon before her. Her heart was beating wildly. This was the scene! this the light! this the hour! this the moment!

‘He is there! he must be there! And yet no, not there, but *here*—somewhere near to

me. . . . I feel it! I know it! . . . He is living! He is near!

Bab did not say these things; even to herself she did not say them.

For a long time, or long it seemed, She stood there on the brown, rugged ness. The light morning breeze sighed as it passed her by; she had no sigh to give in response. Her whole being was strained to the utmost tension he might bear.

At last! *at last!* AT LAST! Bab knelt on the dark bare rock, and covered her face with her hands; and as she knelt she prayed; prayed passionate prayers for whomsoever might be living, or dying, in the far-off speck that she knew to be a boat.

But for her dream, that warning dream, she had not been there.

Beyond doubt this was the very boat of her dream, the very aspect it had had in that vision of the night, a mere dark speck out upon a wide and shining sea.

‘He is there! living or dead, he is *there!*’ Barbara said, rising to her feet, and hastening over the cliffs to find the old man, who was yet doubtless watching. ‘*Living or dead, Hartas Theyn is in yon little boat!*’

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNUSUAL EXPERIENCE.

‘It may be, somewhat thus we shall have leave
To walk with memory,—when distant lies
Poor earth, where we were wont to live and grieve.’

WM. ALLINGHAM

To sit by a warm fireside on a stormy night of autumn or of winter, the glow of the crackling coal brightening the forefront of the scene; the lamplight enlivening the mid-distance; curtains carefully drawn over door and window—to sit thus and listen to the incessant roar of the sea at the foot of the cliffs but just outside, is a state of things apt to have very different effects upon different natures. One man will feel how good and pleasant it is to be safe and comfortable indoors; another will not perceive his thought or emotion to be changed in any way; while a third will be saddened: consciously or un-

consciously his mind will wander to those who must go down to the sea in ships and do business in great waters. To be aware that only a stone's-throw away some brave ship may be sinking to her doom, with souls on board, despairing, helpless, hopeless—to be reminded of this by the ceaseless surging of the sea is to have but little peace of mind while the gale may last. One may readily be brought to wonder why, since the eye may be closed from seeing, the tongue made to cease from speaking, the ear alone should be undefended by any power over its own function? To be able to close one's ears as easily as the eyes are closed would seem a boon not easily to be over-rated—certainly not while compelled to listen to a wild storm at sea.

Night by night, while the hurricane lasted, Damian Aldenmede walked on the beach, now talking with this fisherman, now with that, and seldom returning to his lodgings on the Forecliff before midnight, and bearing within himself then a sense of apprehension, of dread, not to be done away by any reasoning, any argument.

He had never seen much of Hartas Theyn,

and the little he had seen had not been calculated to awaken any esteem; yet, strangely enough, he was aware of a certain drawing, a certain attraction. He had discerned that the face that could look so sullen, so heavy, could yet flush with generous feeling; that the eyes from which such fierce anger could flash were yet eyes that could soften to love and love's most pathetic expression.

'He seems on the way to ruin,' the artist had said to himself; 'but I fancy he is one of the few so tending that one would care to save from going any farther. He may be saved—I feel sure that he may; his strong and pure love for Barbara Burdas may be the means of saving him. . . . Perhaps I have not seen the matter all round.'

These thoughts had come to him only an hour or two before he had heard that Hartas was missing, and inevitably the distressing news had deepened his compassion to the uttermost, and some self-blame was mingled with his thought as he paced the narrow floor of his lodging in a very throe of pity and pain.

Night by night, during this sad, strange

week, Damian Aldenmede was thus constrained by his suffering for another; and night by night the man for whom he suffered was tossing out at sea, drifting there alone, yet not altogether despairing, not in any sense desperate.

It had been no easy matter to undo the ropes wherewith he had been bound; yet he had found it possible, after long effort, to free himself, and with the unfastening of the last knot one phase of his physical suffering had ended.

The sense of being so bound that he could not lift his arms, or raise his hand to his head, had gradually and quite unexpectedly become a very terrible thing, so terrible that for some two hours this alone seemed as if it might be a sufficient cause of death.

Why, because he was not able to move his limbs, he should have felt that he could not breathe, is probably as much a question for the psychologist as the physiologist. The intolerable sense as of strangulation might possibly have been avoided by anyone who had understood the matter sufficiently well to enable him to remain calm, refraining from

all effort, or only making effort of the quietest. But this Hartas did not understand. How should he? So long as his position had had the interest of novelty, so long as others had been near at hand to witness his coolness, his bravery—which yet was not assumed—till then there had been motive enough to sustain his mood. And it was not till some four or five hours had passed by that nature recoiled upon him, and the recoil was strong. The truth of those succeeding hours could never be told in words, written or spoken.

Silvio Pellico has related, for the interest of all time, how terrible are the first hours and days of life within prison walls. The sense of confinement, of the nearness of everything, of the inability to move beyond a certain limit, must in itself be sufficiently dreadful; yet in most recorded cases it would seem as if another dread had been added, vague, pitiful, terrifying, unspeakable. Hartas Theyn had known but little of such records, so that whatever his sensations might be they were not charged with the experience of others. And in one sense his present state bore no resemblance to the state of a man imprisoned.

No walls enclosed him ; the rising wind swept across his heated forehead refreshingly ; there was the consciousness of limitless space about him everywhere. Yet so long as he was bound his suffering was intense, and the effort to free himself from the ropes, the painful, powerful, long-continued effort, was producing something that might without exaggeration be called agony. . . . But at last he was free, and for a time he knew nothing but grateful sensation.

And all the while the hurricane was increasing, the little boat was tossing to and fro like a nutshell upon that wide waste of waters. And now the darkness was of itself a terrible thing. No light was visible anywhere, either on the land or on the sea ; the stars were overspread by the dense storm-cloud. Nothing remained save the heaving sea — heaving, splashing, rolling in that dread darkness. A stouter heart than that of Hartas Theyn might have quailed.

Inevitably in such an hour the man was brought face to face with himself, with his own soul.

When no future remains, the present is

quickly effaced ; it is the past that becomes all we have to offer.

To offer ! When we think of it so—the offering of that past life of ours with all its shortcomings, all its sins, all its selfishnesses, its little care for others, the few hours spent in prayer, the many hours given to the world and worldly matters ; when we would think of this brief earthly life thus, as of something that the soul must take with it—must bring as an offering to lay down at the feet of Him who sits upon the Great White Throne, then we do not dare to think—thought is silenced.

The life is there ; it has been lived. Not one hour of it may be effaced, not one hour lived over again.

To Hartas Theyn that time of silence was long, and dark, and fearful ; he dreaded the awakening of thought that he knew must come if life remained to him but a little while longer.

It is said that drowning men see all the past as in a lightning flash ; and this is entirely conceivable. We most of us have such moments, even when we are far from any chance of drowning. Sometimes they come,

as in a dream, between sleeping and waking—sometimes in hours of deep grief, of anxiety, of suspense. Now and then a flash of disclosing light crosses a moment of intense joy. . . . Usually this disclosure, or the effect of it, remains with us—usually for our good.

The time of enlightenment that came to Hartas Theyn could certainly not be spoken of as momentary ; it lasted for some hours—hours of vivid, vigorous presentment of all the chief incidents and features of his past life ; and each one was heightened as by the light of some spiritual electricity, so that every detail was seen, and in an altogether new aspect. There was nothing now to hide his nakedness from his own soul's sight. He saw that he was naked, and he saw it to his bitter and painful shame.

Strangely enough, the very words of St. Paul came to him as he sat there, chilled, suffering much in body, and yet more in mind. Doubtless they were as an echo from some sermon heard long ago :

‘ For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven :

If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.’

It was somewhat of a surprise to himself that a text of Scripture should cross his mind, especially since it appeared to come with some accuracy ; that he should be drawn to dwell upon it, to try to find the meaning of it, was more surprising still.

He had yet to learn how true it is that even the smallest amount of spiritual awakening, of spiritual light and strength, means an immense widening of whatever powers the intellect may possess.

Carlyle's definition of genius is this :

‘The clearer presence of God Most High in the soul of man.’

And it is certain that no truer or finer definition of that mysterious quality, or faculty, has been given to the world as yet. No sooner does a man begin to be aware of some higher influence working within his soul than he becomes also aware that that higher influence, acting *through the soul*, is developing his thinking and reasoning and perceiving powers to the uttermost. The event, unprecedented in his soul's history, is equally unprecedented in his mental history—a fact he is apt to perceive with as much regret as astonish-

ment. He now knows what he 'might have been!'

But how dimly he knows! His utmost imagination may not disclose to him all that true living had disclosed.

That night at sea—that first dread night of many that were to be yet more dread, was a crisis in the life of Hartas Theyn.

How could he have been so senseless, so unseeing? . . . By-and-by he became aware that this comparative sight was but as comparative blindness.

And over and over came the thought, 'What I might have been! If I had tried simply to do what I knew to be right, to be wise; if, as the Canon said the other day, I had but been true to the light I had, what might I not have been?'

And then thought itself seemed hushed. He could not realize the man he might have been had he been happy, good, respected, at peace with others, at ease with himself. The ideas were all too dim, too unusual. He was not equal to the double strain of listening to a wild storm that was blowing so closely about him, and at the same time creating

a vision of that slain self whose wreck he was.

He knew the wreck.

‘If *I* had been different, all had been different,’ he said, speaking audibly, since there was none to hear. ‘*She* would have cared then; she might even have looked up to me, instead of despising me, as I know she does . . . as I know she *has* done! . . . How will it be with her, with others, when I am only a memory? . . . Will they care to remember at all? *Can she forget?*’

But as he lay there, the boat lurching heavily from side to side, shuddering under the blows of wind and wave, the power of consecutive thought began to desert him. Very gradually it departed from him; but there came an hour when neither remorse, nor hope, nor fear dwelt with him persistently. It was only by moments at a time that he could lay bare his soul before that Unknown God whom hitherto he had only thought of with a blind, unreasoning, ignorant dread. It did not even seem strange to him that the dread had passed away, that he could

speaking as to One near—not speaking complainingly, not bitterly, not even as one bewailing his evil case; but simply as one seeking forgiveness, first of all forgiveness; and to this end he did not spare himself in confession. From the first memory of his life to the last there was relief, unutterable relief, in laying bare his soul before that soul's Maker, in desiring pardon for sins remembered and unremembered—sins of boyhood and of later age, sins of omission and sins of commission, sins of body and sins of soul—never before had he known such relief as that which came to him as he tossed there on the midnight sea, recalling all his life, all his errors; and then, in desiring forgiveness for the same, bending his knee as reverently as he might, but only able to do this for moments at a time. First, forgiveness he craved; then compassion; last of all, companionship.

‘Be near me!’ he cried, when once more the darkness came down and the storm was apparently at its worst. ‘Be near me! I don’t deserve it; I know, I feel I do not. But stay with me, good God—stay with me through this night!’

CHAPTER XXXV.

STILL DRIFTING, DRIFTING ON. NO LAND. NO
SAIL.

‘O, let me be awake, my God !
Or let me sleep away.’

AGAIN the darkness fell and stayed ; the storm still raged on ; and a long period of merciful unconsciousness came upon Hartas Theyn, whether of sleep, or of the semblance of coma that comes of exhaustion and hunger, he did not know, nor might he know how long it had lasted, whether four hours or forty. He awoke at last, unrefreshed, and consumed by a burning thirst. That was his worst physical trouble, that terrible thirst.

Only once did a dread paroxysm of hunger seize him. Since then he has written the story of that fierce hour on paper—in a little

book not yet yellow with age or worn with time. There is no need to reproduce his words here. Suffering of that kind may be studied, by all who care for such study, in many accounts of shipwreck, and in most records of Arctic research. It is not always profitable.

Afterward it seemed to him that all that had been really terrible had lain within the lines of his mental or spiritual suffering, rather than in the physical.

From time to time there arose a cry in his heart, but now it was one cry, and now another.

‘Would that I might live my life again!’ That was the cry that came most frequently. ‘Would that I might live but one week of that old life!’

‘To see my father’s face, to sit there by the old fireside, were it but for an hour—*but for one hour*—oh, God, what would I not give?’

‘And to see *her*, to touch her hand! Is it possible that yesterday—was it yesterday? was it a week ago?—I might have done it? And I did not know. I did not know what it

all meant, that heavy, stupid, misused life. No, I knew nothing yesterday.'

And ever between his wordless thought there came the sound of the wind as it rose passionately, and fell with its own disturbed sadness. And the waves leapt upon the little boat, and hurled and clashed together, now in the darkness, and now in the dawn, now in the drear setting of the sun. And he who was drifting there did not always know whether the dim light meant the coming on of night or the departing ; for ever again and again came that prolonged merciful unconsciousness.

The thunderstorm that broke upon the Bight of Ulvstan about that hour when Jim Tyas came to his death had not seemed so terrible to Hartas Theyn, and by that he knew that he must have been far enough away at that time. The recollection of it was about the last definite recollection that he had.

After that, for some four or five days and nights, he must have lain more or less in that strange and ever-deepening stupor. It was not—so he thought—at any time pure,

simple, refreshing sleep. Though he dreamt strange dreams, and had strange visions, yet it was not sleep.

Always while the storm lasted he was conscious of the deafening, exhausting rush and roar of the wind, the whirl, and flash, and roll of the vast unbroken waves. That the wind had remained so long unchanged, so that he was kept out there in the deep water, had been matter of gratitude too deep for words. Having no oars, he could have done nothing to help himself, and he knew that if he were once to come near to the broken surf that fringed the land nothing could save him.

Yet the knowledge did not now, even in his waking moments, distress him ; feeling was too much benumbed for that. It would soon be over, that last dread strife, with that last dread enemy to be destroyed ; while the death he was even now dying, hour by hour, might in the end be very painful.

The storm began to subside during the fourth night, and Hartas, rousing himself from a long lethargic slumber, saw the gleam

of the rising sun upon the gradually calming sea. But he saw nothing else—no sail, no land.

Thrice a screw-steamer had passed by, one quite near, and he had managed to stand up in the boat to wave his blue silk scarf to and fro with some energy; but the steamer passed on, and took no notice. It was a time of harrowing excitement and suspense, and what wonder that he felt sure he had been seen? The two other steamers were too far away for suspicion, though each time his effort was made to the uttermost of his power.

All the last days and nights, the dawns, the twilights, seemed mingled together in a strange confusion; and since the calm that succeeded the storm was so great, there was now no external influence to arouse him. The temperature was not low for the time of year; he had no sense of hunger; there was nothing to be done but to lie in seeming slumber, drifting on, and on, and on, not even knowing that since the wind had changed he must be drifting back within sight of land.

From all suffering he had ceased, from all

hoping, from all despairing. That last dawn rose slowly, quietly, holily ; and it rose upon one who might see nothing of its beauty, know nothing of its dread solemnity. The little boat might have been his bier for all he knew.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW RESCUE CAME.

‘Touch not—hold !
And if you weep still, weep where John was laid
While Jesus loved him.’

E. B. BROWNING.

LONG afterward Barbara Burdas remembered that autumn morning, and remembered certain passages of it with a feeling that was almost shame. Had she really forgotten herself so far, her position, the strange complications of her life, as to put her trembling hand upon Squire Theyn’s arm, to urge him to come with her at once—*at once!*

‘*He is there!*’ she had cried, one hand pressing in excited entreaty the old man’s shoulder, the other pointing to that speck out upon the rose-red sea. ‘Do you understand? It is your son! He is there, out at sea—*dead or*

alive, he is there! Won't you come with me? Won't you come at once?'

The Squire did not repulse her in any way, yet he did not respond, or seem to comprehend. The old man was wearied by the want of sleep, exhausted by sorrow, by remorse, by suspense. The words he heard were only half understood, and this Barbara perceived. But she dared not, could not stay longer there. Besides, her instinct told her that Squire Theyn could not be of use in the present crisis.

'*He is there!*' she repeated as she flew on over the fields, brushing the dew from the grass, from the tall dead hemlocks, the crisp rest-harrow ; her eyes still straining to watch that small dark speck out upon the wide, still sea. '*He is there!*' she kept on saying, saying it solely for her own consolation.

There was no one else to be consoled. The little townlet had not yet awakened, and the tide being barely half out, Samson Verrill had not yet returned from the lonely point of rock where he still kept watch. Barbara knew that he would be there, and she knew that all the little world about her

would be yet asleep, and that time would be required for any effective awakening. And who could say what time might mean? A quarter of an hour—nay, five minutes might mean much to a man who had been drifting about the North Sea without sustenance of any kind for over a week. There was no opportunity for deliberation. Barbara flew down to the beach, unmoored the lightest boat she could find there, and managed by almost superhuman effort to launch it all alone. As she drew rapidly away from the shore, she saw that the Squire was hastening down the cliff; had he understood at last? Would he do all that might be done in the way of preparation for her return—*her* return, and *his*—his of whom not only her thought but her very life seemed full? The smoke was beginning to curl upward from a cottage chimney on the Forecliff; the gulls from the rocks to the south were flying in and out by myriads, chuckling, screaming, subsiding, rising again; and there, far away upon the dark point in the distance, Samson Verrill stood, lonely between sea and sky. Barbara could see him quite plainly,

and he would see her, that she knew, and he would wonder what her errand might be ; not being able from his own comparatively low-lying position to see the speck that she had seen from the utmost height of the northern cliff-top. But Barbara did not think long of Samson Verrill. Thought was merged in action, in effort ; such effort as Barbara herself had never made before this hour. Not the strongest man could have made swifter progress ; yet, after nearly an hour's rowing, that dark speck still seemed leagues away upon the subsiding silvery gray of the sun-lit sea.

It was not always that Barbara could see the small dark point which she knew to be a boat, yet she rowed on in the direction where she had first seen it ; and now and then for her helping she caught sight of it, and the sight lent always fresh energy to her utmost effort.

At last she came nearer, consciously, tremulously. She had not been mistaken, it *was* a boat, a small, brightly painted boat, blue and white and vivid green, the exact counterpart of that she knew to be missing ;

but why should she say even that to herself, being so assured it was the same? She stood up in her own boat, shading her eyes with her hand from the uprising sun. Then suddenly she felt her face flush with fear, with a strange unknown dread. After all, *could* it be that the boat was empty? Was it possible? She saw no sign.

More slowly, more sadly now, she bent herself again to the oars, then sadder and slower still, as one who draws near to the bed on which a friend is lying, breathing out the last breath of the life that had been to others so precious, so dear.

The girl dared not look. She paused a little, rowed on again, stopped, covering her face with her hands. She was quite near, yet no sign came, no sound. . . At last, she raised her head.

A wild throbbing pulsation seized all her frame. He was there! Someone was there—a dark figure was lying helplessly at the bottom of the boat, toward the stern. And it was the figure of him she had seen in her dream.

She made no cry, asked no question: that would have been so useless. And then it

was that she entered into that vivid vision once more, not conscious of what she did. Afterward the dream and the deeds of its realization were as one in her recollection.

She made no effort to arouse or to move the prostrate, stirless figure that lay, as the dead lie, at the bottom of the boat ; but, seeing it, regret awoke like a lightning flash. Why had she brought no food, no water, no restoratives of any kind ? Had excitement bereft her of sense ?

She hardly dared to look upon the pallid face, above which the heavy black hair was lying in wild disarrangement. Removing the oars from the boat she was in, placing them in the rowlocks of the little boat that had been drifting to and fro during the terrible storm, she sat down for a moment or two overcome by exhaustion, by emotion. Yet she could not look upon the face of Hartas Theyn.

Presently she took the boat in which she had rowed out in tow, and started back for the land. For near two hours she pulled slowly to the shore, knowing but little more than Hartas Theyn himself knew.

By this time there was a crowd gathered upon the beach, an eager, anxious, fervid, almost unbelieving crowd. David Andoe was foremost in grasping the bow of the boat as it grated upon the bed of gravel. Damian Aldenmede was but just behind, and had the greater strength of the two. Between them they lifted the dead, or dying, man to the shore, and carried him to the nearest house. Early as it yet was, Canon Godfrey was there, and Mrs. Kerne. The news had spread fast and far. . . . As a matter of course, old Ephraim was in the very forefront of the scene; and to Barbara's satisfaction he was there when David Andoe returned, and was able to help her to reach the cottage on the Forecliff. She needed help, though she was hardly able to thank those who helped her.

'Let me be,' she said faintly, as she sank into a chair by the fire. 'Let me be! . . . It's all I'd ask of you—let me be!'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FORGIVENESS.

‘ A MERRICLE! Noän sa much of a merricle!’ said old Ephraim when they told him with many wondering words that Hartas Theyn yet lived. ‘ Whya Ah’ve knowed a man myself, the captain o’ the *Eagle* brigantine, sailing fra Shields for Dieppe’ (*Deep*, he called it), ‘ laden wi’ coals. An’ the vessel were o’er-ta’en i’ the gale o’ ’31 ; an’ ivery man aboard except the Captain were washed off o’ the deck wiv a single sweep of a single wave, an’ he’d ha gone an’ all ef so it hadn’t been ’at he’d been lashed to the mast. But lashed he were, an’—fortnit for him—lashed he remained. Noo mind it’s no lie Ah’m tellin’ o’ ya. Ah knowed the man, Hebbin’ton, his name were, Captain Hebbin’ton, but whether James or John, Ah’ll not säiy. But this

Ah will saäy, for I heerd him tell the taäle wi' my oäin ears, as how he were tossin' aboot i' the German Ocean for no less nor two-an'-twenty days—noo, *two-and-twenty*! Think o' that! An' never no bite nor sup passed his lips save once, an' that was after a heavy rain, when he wrung his shirt-sleeves, an' so got a few drops o' water! That were something like a marvel! . . . Eight days! an' the last fouer on 'em fairly mild weather! Well, it's hardly much to boast on, let aloäine callin' it a merricle!

Such was old Ephraim's opinion, but it need hardly be said that it was not generally held throughout the neighbourhood. The Squire's son had been removed, so soon as Dr. Douglas considered it safe, to Mrs. Kerne's house, where he lay, still exhausted, still silent, still pallid. Thorhilda and Mrs. Godfrey came and went; Rhoda came and stayed; and the Squire seldom left Laburnum Villa till nightfall. Yet, so far, little was known to anyone of Hartas's experience during that terrible time, or its effect upon himself. It was evident that he could not talk of these things as yet.

When at last his strength did begin to return to him it was but natural that his father should ask him of the beginning of the strange event ; that he should desire to know how it had been brought about, and above all, by whose immediate agency. The Squire had only suspicion where others felt certainty.

It was a fine October afternoon when the old man first spoke of the past. The sun was streaming through Mrs. Kerne's costly Indian curtains ; shining into a large richly-furnished room, laden with ornament of perhaps not the most refined description. Hartas was lying upon a sofa near the fire, his father sat on a chair near the foot of it. Canon Godfrey was by his side. Mrs. Kerne was walking up and down the room, knitting as she went, openly confessing herself too nervous to sit still.

‘ You must forgive me, you must bear with me,’ Hartas said, raising himself by feeble effort from the cushions.

And it was a strange face that was lifted to look upon the two men beside him, a face never again to be what it had been. Not

only the expression, but every feature seemed changed. The dark eyes, though deeply sunk, yet looked larger, and had deeper intensity of colour, of meaning, of outlook. The once bronzed face was shrunken, and pale, and nervous-looking. A certain sad eagerness was written upon the countenance, a certain sad remembrance; it was the face of a man who had passed through his life's crisis, and was yet all unaware of its full meaning, of the influence it was intended to have upon the days to be.

'You must forgive me,' he said in answer to his father's desire for knowledge of the days but just past. 'I know the men; one is not living, so I am told. The others shall be to me as if they had died also. . . . It cannot be otherwise, it cannot. They did wrong. They were mistaken, they were cruel—bitterly cruel and hard. But it is not for me to punish them, not for anyone belonging to me. Don't say any more, don't ask me to say any more. . . . I can say nothing but that.'

For a moment Squire Theyn could hardly speak, so divided he was between emotions of

varying nature. Disappointment was probably uppermost.

‘They’ll say it’s cowardice, nothing but rank cowardice!’ he exclaimed bitterly.

Hartas smiled; a wan, sad smile it was.

‘No, they won’t think that,’ he said faintly.

After a little more uncomfortable and unprofitable discussion the Squire got up and went away. He would not quarrel with this newly-restored son of his, not willingly, yet it was an effort to subdue his anger, and Mrs. Kerne was feeling for him and with him as she seldom did.

When Canon Godfrey and Hartas were left alone, the former asked a question he had been wishing to ask for some time.

‘Would you mind telling me *why* you wish to shield these men—these ruffians, I may almost say?’

‘No; I can tell you,’ Hartas replied, speaking with the new gentleness of manner that seemed so curiously natural to him already, as if some inner and better self had been set free from the outer. ‘I can tell *you*, but surely you do not need that I should put it into words? You can see for yourself that for *her*

sake alone—Barbara's—it would be better that the matter should drop at once and for ever. If I bring it to light, if I bring these men to justice, the cause of their deed must become even a commoner topic for conversation than it is now. And how could I bear that, knowing how ill she would bear it? . . . No; help me once more, be the friend you have always been, even when I couldn't see that you were my friend at all. And try to persuade my father to see the matter from my point of view. . . . He will thank you afterward; so shall I.'

The Canon thought for a moment; then he lifted his kindly blue eyes to the face of the still suffering man before him.

'I will do what you wish,' he said, with an eager concession in his manner. 'And I believe after all that you are right; I believe you are. It would do little good to bring these men to what is called justice—it might do harm. I do think you are right, that the affair, painful as it is, had better be allowed to die out of itself.'

'Better far; and I thank you. . . . But now, how shall I put the question? Have you nothing to tell me of *her*—of Barbara?'

‘Not much—that is, not much that will gladden you in any way to hear. I can only say that the more I see of her, the more I discern the true greatness, the true beauty of her character. She seems to be absolutely without any trace of selfishness, of self-seeking.’

‘Have you seen her lately?’

‘I saw her yesterday; the baby was baptized. Barbara, your sister, and myself were the sponsors. . . . Poor little mite that it is! What will be its future, I wonder?’

‘But Barbara? . . . Has she got over it all—that terrible time? Did she look like herself?’

‘To tell the truth she did not, not quite. She looks older, paler, thinner, as if she had gone through an illness. But what wonder? And she is young enough to recover; and I expect she will do so, by-and-by.’

‘What makes you say that?’ Hartas asked, with the difficulty in his voice that comes of emotion.

‘Hope makes me say it,’ the Canon replied. Presently he added, ‘You have not forgotten that day on the scaur? You remember what I said?’

‘Yes, I remember,’ Hartas replied, with faint white lips, and unhopeful tones; ‘perhaps it would be better if I did not.’

‘What makes you say that? Of what are you thinking?’

‘I am thinking of her, that it cannot be, that it can never be, that dream of mine. How shall I tell you all—all I have discovered? Sorrow enlightens one. . . . I believe, as you kindly told me you believed, that Barbara cares for me; perhaps she may even care more than I know; but there are things she cares for more. . . . I fancy she sees a certain honourableness in refusing to consent to a marriage that seems in her sight one of—what shall I say?—mere difference of position seems so poor a ground, and I feel sure that it does not cover all her thought. To say the truth, I fear that to Barbara my sister Thorhilda represents all goodness, all refinement, all culture, all that she herself thinks highest and worthiest; and therefore it is that her admiration is a sort of worship, a worship that counts self-sacrifice as the purest pleasure. I have expressed my thought badly, inadequately, but you will know what I mean.

And this—this event—before I see Barbara I seem to know that it will make her less willing to yield than ever. And I will not urge her; I will never again, if I can help it, put any pressure upon her. I seem to know now that it can never be, that dream of mine! . . . Yet how I care for her! *How I care!* . . . But forgive me! I never meant to say all this. Forgive me, and don't betray me!

Hardly thinking of what he was doing under the pressure of emotion, the Canon rose to his feet and held out his hand as a sign of leave-taking.

'I will not betray you,' he said gently, and with effort; 'but let me mention one thing that I had been thinking of: it seems to me that as a matter of common gratitude Barbara Burdas should be asked to come and see you. . . . She saved your life, remember.'

'She will not come,' Hartas replied instantly, his fear overcoming his desire.

'Do you think not? . . . I imagine that she will, if I make a point of it.'

'Ah, if you put it so!' Hartas said, turning his face away in disappointed sadness. 'She will not refuse you, but her coming under

those conditions will be no help to me. . . .
I know her better now than I used to do. I
almost understand her ; but she is above me,
and consequently she sees beyond me. . . .
She may come, I may see her, but we shall
separate as we meet, as far apart, quite as far,
or perhaps even farther.'

And even as Hartas predicted, so it came to
pass.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BARBARA BURDAS AND HARTAS THEYN.

‘The eyes smiled too,
But ’twas as if remembering they had wept,
And knowing they should some day weep again.’

HEARING footsteps upon the garden path behind him—footsteps waited for, listened for long—Hartas turned with a crimson tide of emotion flushing all his face. Two figures were coming towards him—Barbara Burdas and his sister Thorhilda. But for a second or two he hardly recognised the former, and the very strangeness about her enabled him to recover himself. Was this young yet stately-looking woman, dressed in quiet, simple mourning of no antiquated date, yet far enough removed from the fashionable—was this Barbara Burdas? He had to assure himself by an effort.

Considering the shortness of the time since the first appearance of Damian Aldenmede at Ulvstan Bight, certainly the change in Barbara Burdas was very great, and said much for her powers of adaptability—yet, nay, what a low word is that to use! She had adapted herself to nothing. In some ways she had found her own, yet that but scantily, scarcely. She had much yet to find, though, to her credit be it said, she hardly knew even that. She only knew that as yet certain desires within her were all unfulfilled.

All the way Barbara was being led step by step, not knowing whither she went, not knowing why she was led onward at all. That she should be accused of the vain and vulgar ambition of desiring social advancement did not occur to her, nor, for the honour of the humanity about her be it said, did it occur to others.

She was not at all aware that when she advanced so tremulously to meet Hartas Theyn in Mrs. Kerne's garden she was other than the Barbara Burdas she had always been—the change, so it seemed, was in him.

The first few moments were only made en-

durable by the presence of Miss Theyn, who understood the difficulty of this first meeting, and now, as always, had enough of sympathy to offer. If she felt any pain she was successful in hiding it. Turning to her brother, seeing his sad, white, unhopeful face, then looking upon Barbara, admiring the tall, fine figure of the girl, seeing how the dark, bronzed face was paled by intense thought, intense suffering, how the light of new perception was visible in the deep blue eyes—seeing these things, she could not but be surprised by the alteration she saw. She had not dreamed that a few short days, or weeks, or even months, could work such change in any human personality.

There was a moment that might have been awkward but for Barbara's adequate and straightforward courtesy.

‘You are better?’ she said, looking into the face that was watching hers so eagerly, so yearningly.

She took the hand Hartas held out—a hand so white, so thin, so tremulous, that her heart ached to see it.

‘Yes, I am all right now,’ he replied with

pallid lips and somewhat troubled tone. Then he added : ' It was good of you to come and see me.'

' The Canon wished it,' she said simply.

' And you would do anything he wished ?'

' Yes, *anything* ! He could never ask me to do aught I wouldn't be glad to do.'

' That is high praise from you ?'

' I didn't mean it for praise,' Bab said, discerning instantly the unbecomingness of praise of hers bestowed upon one like Canon Godfrey. ' I didn't mean it for *that* ! I only meant to say that I'd that regard for him that I'd never had for no one in my life afore, and, as I think, can never have for no one again.'

' Not for Mr. Aldenmede ?' Hartas asked, wishing the word unsaid, so soon as it escaped him.

' No, not even for him. He's good ; but it's not quite the same sort of goodness. . . . He's different altogether.'

Hartas was not ill-pleased to hear this eulogy of one not only closely connected with himself, but well-disposed toward him ; and the change, the new power of perception visible in Barbara, was impressing him more at every turn of her every phrase. Her

grammar might be defective, but the utterance of almost every word was pure and true, and for him the inflection of each tone had the charm, the winningness, that only love can lend. Yet his heart did not rise to the charm—rather did it sink, depressed, unhopeful.

Quite unperceived Miss Theyn had left these two together, and now they were walking slowly along under the belt of all but leafless trees that divided the wide garden from the paddock where Mrs. Kerne's pony was grazing at his ease. The afternoon was warm and yellow and hazy ; a late rose or two leaned out from the garden beds as if craving notice for having bloomed in November, and a very grove of hollyhocks stood in a corner, late, straggling, and with only a few half-developed flowers on the top of each tall stem.

‘Are they English flowers, those?’ Barbara asked, touching a soft, pale pink hollyhock with her black cotton glove. ‘I was reading of some foreign flowers the other night in a book Mr. Aldenmede lent me, and I asked him about them afterward. The strangest flowers they are—orchids they call them. There’ll be some i’ this garden, I reckon?’

‘Don’t talk of things like that, Barbara—not now, not to-day,’ Hartas pleaded, and there was something strangely touching in his pleading. All the old roughness—the almost rudeness—was gone, and in the place of these things there was a gentleness, a wistfulness, a refinement, that had more power to move than Barbara was prepared to resist.

‘Don’t speak of those things,’ he begged. ‘Have you nothing else to say to me? You don’t know how I’ve been hoping that you had—hoping against hope. . . . Have you forgotten that you saved my life? that but for you I shouldn’t have been here?’

Barbara gently interrupted him.

‘You were drifting in,’ she said, lifting a face which had all the recollection of that strange time written on the features of it.

‘Perhaps ; but it must have been very slowly. And who can say that I should have lived to touch the land? But let that pass, I know in my own mind that I owe my life to you ; and I am glad that I do. . . . I’ve heard it said that people always think kindly of anybody they’ve done a good turn to. . . . But I’m not going to take advantage of that.

. . . I know you would have done the same for anybody else.'

'So I should if I'd been moved in the same way,' Bab replied quietly.

'Still, I can never forget.'

'Nor can I.'

'No ; but it will not mean the same thing to you. I see that. . . . I think I saw it before, and I made up my mind not to weary you with the old entreaty. . . . You know what I mean, Barbara—what is in my thought?'

'Yes ; I know, and you are right in not pressing it. It is wise and kind of you to have made up your mind not to do that.'

She spoke so calmly, with such quiet self-possession, that it was not possible for Hartas to discern how her heart was sinking with every word she uttered, sinking for the need of love, the return of that love she was being drawn to give so lavishly. Her very strength, contrasted with Hartas Theyn's present weakness, seemed a new reason for new and increasing love. Yet when did love ever stand in need of reason? 'Because it was he ; because it was I.' That is the beginning and the end of love's reasoning.

Hartas did not reply for a while to Barbara's seemingly cold speech. He could not, being chilled and hurt. At last he said simply, 'Thank you,' but he said it in so weary a way, with lips so pallid and eyes so sad, that Barbara could not part from him thus.

'Try to understand me,' she said. 'I'm trying—trying to do what seems right; and all the more I'm striving, because everybody seems so kind and good. Think of Canon Godfrey, of how he speaks to me, how he looks at me, and how he thinks for me. If I were the greatest lady in the land he could care no more. And then Miss Theyn, your sister. . . .'

'Well, what of her?' Hartas interposed with a touch of the old hastiness.

'Oh, I could say so much of her! How can I begin? She is so different,' Barbara began enthusiastically. 'She is so very different from anybody else I have ever known or seen.'

'She's at the root of all your hesitation—of all my sorrow,' Hartas broke in again.

Barbara thought for a moment.

‘That’s only true in one sense,’ she replied. ‘It is because I know Miss Theyn, and see what your wife ought to be, that I cannot say the word you want me to say. From the very first hour I saw her I knew that she was the kind of lady you should have, that if any good were to come to you, any upliftin’ (forgive the plain speaking), you should marry some one as much above you as your sister is, instead of one so much below you as I am. Your father sees this ; he shows it in the very way he looks at me. And Mrs. Kerne knows it, and Mrs. Godfrey ; they can’t help but know. And they all feel, and one way or another they make me feel, that I am the one thing that stands in the way of your betterin’ yourself by marriage. Excuse the plain words—I’ve none better. But now think for a minute, how could I say that word you want me to say, an’ keep a shred of self-respect afterward? I could not do it. But there! . . . I’ve said over much. You’re none strong yet. Won’t you go into that little summer-house and sit down?’

‘No ; I don’t want to sit down. I’m not tired—not with that sort of tiredness.’

Then presently Hartas stopped and turned, and took the girl's hand in his, fixing his dark, sad eyes upon her lovely, yet much pained face.

'I said I would make no plea,' he began tremulously ; 'but I cannot, I cannot help it! It is so terrible! How shall I bear it? How shall I face the future at all? . . . Is that your last word? . . . Would it make any difference if my sister herself came and asked you to be my wife?'

Barbara was nearly as pale as Hartas himself was. The conflict within her was passionately strong.

'I cannot say that it wouldn't make a difference,' she replied. 'I might yield, *I might* ; but I should always know that in one way or another she had been forced, overcome. . . . And no happiness could come of it, believe me—no happiness that could last ; none for you, none for me. . . . I cannot say all that's in me. There's a deal one can find no expression for ; and I think and feel so many things that I cannot say in words. . . . Sometimes I think of your sister's marryin', as they say she's about to do, that son of Lady Meredith's.'

‘She’s not *Lady Meredith*,’ Hartas interrupted brusquely.

‘Isn’t she? They always call her so over at the Howes. But anyhow, if your sister is to be her daughter, how would they like to meet me—*me*, a flither-picker off the scaur? How would Mrs. Percival Meredith like to have to say to the grand people about her, “This is my sister-in-law—this bait-gatherer.” . . .’

‘How much do you look like—like that this afternoon?’

Barbara blushed, for once a little self-consciously.

‘It’s not looks. I am *that*—just that. And oh, how could you ever dream that foolish dream, knowing what you did know, even then! I didn’t know! I wish I had known—I *wish* I had. But I didn’t. . . . And now there’s only one thing,’ Barbara continued, lifting a pathetic, beseeching face to the sad eyes that were watching her. ‘There’s only one thing left for us. Can it be? Will you let it be? Will you be my friend?’

‘*Friend*, in that sense? No, *never*!’ Hartas replied with vehemence. ‘It couldn’t

be—it could never be! Friends! you and me! Think of the torture of it!’

‘Torture!’ Barbara repeated in surprise. ‘Torture! I was thinking of it as bein’ only a happiness. . . . You don’t know what it would be to me. I’m so lone at times, so desperate lone. . . . I’d not weary you, not if I knew!’

Her very pleading, the pathos of it, the ‘sweet reasonableness,’ were more than Hartas could bear just then.

‘It cannot be,’ he said again. ‘I could never stand it; no, never. If there’s nothing else left we’d better part! . . .’

‘Well, then, let us part kindly,’ Barbara said, speaking with increased effort. ‘Then if by chance we have to meet anywhere, we’d meet without more—more pain than need be.’

The sun had gone down cold and wan behind the leafless ash-trees; a damp, misty air was coming over the fields, over the brown moor beyond. Hartas shivered and turned away, white and desponding.

‘Pain! There’s nought else but pain nowhere. The world’s full of pain. . . . I wish—I wish you had left me to drift on to death in peace!’

Barbara made no reply. They were near the little gate that led out into the lane ; and half-unconsciously their pace grew slower and slower. It was Hartas who broke the silence at last.

‘Forgive me ; I pray you to forgive me,’ he said in a tone and manner quite unlike his own. ‘I did not mean that—no, God knows I did not ; and He alone knows what my gratitude is. . . . I must be miserably weak, for I meant all to be so very different to-day. . . . It was that overcame me—the idea of parting. How can I bear it ? And you seemed to take it so lightly, so easily.’

They were standing by the gate now, facing each other. The last moment was near. Barbara held out her hand, and on her face was the betrayal that few can see and misunderstand.

‘Did you suppose that I could add my pain to yours ?’ she asked, suppressing the deep undertone of feeling that struggled below.

‘Then it is pain to you ?’

‘Look in my face, and see,’ Barbara replied, quite unconsciously quoting from one of

the most beautiful and touching poems in the English language.

‘Then if it be so—if I may know even that—I think I can bear—I *think* I can. . . . Yet—yet it is hard!’

A moment or two longer they stood there in the deepening twilight, hand in hand, heart beating to heart, loving, suffering, silent.

Each feared to add to the other’s sorrow by uttering the final last word. The after-glow had faded from the sky; darkness was beginning to overspread the earth with all the strange stillness that darkness brings.

‘I must go,’ Barbara said at last, thinking of the little ones at home—especially of the baby, who now sometimes seemed the best loved of them all, and certainly needed most of her loving attention.

‘I must go. . . . And in spite of what you said, I’ll look to you when I want a friend.’

‘Come to me when you want friendliness. . . . I’d always do aught I could, you’d know that.’

‘But you won’t be all a friend might be to me?’

‘No. . . . It must be more, or less. And you’ve said it is to be less.’

‘Good-night, then. . . . You’ll understand me better some day.’

‘I think I shall,’ Hartas replied quietly, sadly, yet with deep significance in his tone.

‘I will think, even yet, that there will come a time for better understanding.’

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BANDS OF FATE TWINE CLOSER AND YET
CLOSER.

‘Seldom comes the moment
In life, which is indeed sublime and weighty
To make a great decision possible.’

COLERIDGE.

WHILE all these things had been happening in the Bight down below, life had not been standing still on the higher ground. At last Damian Aldenmede had become acquainted with Percival Meredith—at last he had come to know that everywhere it was being said that Mr. Meredith was engaged, or ‘all but engaged,’ to Miss Theyn. He had felt a momentary stun, then disbelief had followed. When he came to know Mr. Percival Meredith but a little more intimately, his disbelief had become tinged with scorn. Thorhilda Theyn, a pure, noble-minded, high-

toned woman to marry a man like that ! But there thought paused awhile; the artist was not the man to discolour his own soul by even a momentary dwelling upon the imperfections of another. Having spent one evening in the society of Mr. Percival Meredith, he felt no more inclination to disturb himself. That he should make a friend of such a man being an utter impossibility, was it not a thousand times more impossible that Miss Theyn should accept him for her husband, her companion, her friend, her guide for life ? Ah ! why trouble himself for a second with the gossip of one village, or of two ? And the more he thought the more certainly he convinced himself. Seeing in imagination, in memory, those pure, far-seeing, and far-seeking gray eyes looking into his, betraying all their depth of tenderness, all their assurance of strength, then turning to that other face, those other eyes with all their disclosures of selfishness, of narrowness, of other things to which he put no name—how could he trouble himself any further ? And yet the trouble did not quite die down.

It might have gone lower than it did

but for a brief conversation he had had with Gertrude Douglas, whom he had met one morning, by untoward accident, on the promenade. Miss Douglas was looking very beautiful, feeling full of power—the power that comes of youth, of beauty, of health, of the consciousness of social adequateness.

‘Ah, is it *you*, is it *really you*?’ she exclaimed in her wonderfully sweet, and liquid and musical voice. Her words, her pretty laugh, came like a rippling rain of music. ‘How unusual it is to see you on the promenade! I thought you despised all such frivolities?’

‘No; I trust that contempt is not much in my way.’

‘Oh, I don’t know about that!’ Miss Douglas exclaimed, all unaware that she was treading upon the thinnest ice. ‘I thought you looked dreadfully scornful at the Hartofts the other evening—especially when you looked at poor Mr. Meredith!’

Then Gertrude laughed a little, and blushed, and let her long dark eyelashes droop over her unperceptive eyes in a very effective way.

No answer coming—none being possible to

Damian Aldenmede—she went on again, quite as unconsciously as before.

‘Of course I didn’t wonder; nobody who knew as much as I know could have wondered. . . . But don’t be too much cast down; it isn’t a settled thing yet. . . . However, I suppose it will be soon. There is to be another grand dinner-party at the Rectory on the 22nd, and I expect it will be announced that evening. . . . You will be there, of course?’

‘No; I shall not,’ Aldenmede replied, turning away with the scantiest courtesy, and not able at that moment to weigh all the contradictions and insinuations that he had heard in their proper balance. Entering his lodging a few minutes later, and finding the invitation to the dinner-party Miss Douglas had spoken of lying on his writing-table, he could have groaned aloud for the folly that had led him to declare his intention so prematurely. Yet the strain of perverseness that is in every nervous man or woman would not permit him to accept the pleasure now—for pleasure it would have been, however mingled with pain. He had pain enough

as it was ; every recollection of the past, every thought of the future, had its own separate suffering. Even his face grew crimson, remembering that moment in the coast-guard's cottage, when he had at least betrayed himself to himself, and hoped—in a certain sense—that he also had betrayed the truth to her. Yet no sign had been given to him—or if any, then only such as must for ever forbid his hoping. He had watched ; he had sought her presence ; he had refrained from seeking it : yet by no effort could he extract any sign. The least response to his advances, the least seeming acceptance of his evident desire for—for friendship, to put it at its lowest ; the smallest sign of any hint would have given him hope. But in his worst moment he could do this justice to Miss Theyn—that she had not falsely allured him.

* * * * *

And meantime, how was it with Miss Theyn herself ? Not well. None who knew could make answer that it was well with her. To be drawn by all that is best and purest

within you and about you on an upward road, yet to know and feel yourself gradually gliding downward, can never produce aught save an absolute misery. Ignore that misery how you will, call it by what name you will, the thing remains the same, as sooner or later you must know.

In excuse for her only this may be said, that she had not divined the full depth of the feeling Damian Aldenmede already had for her. Half-unknowingly, yet *only half*, she had checked the advance he would have made; she had dreaded his coming farther, nearer, even while she had hoped that he would *insist* upon coming. There was *his* defect. He should have treated as straws all that stood in the way of the end he desired.

In excuse for him there was this—in his former life he had loved, he had been betrayed, and he had suffered. What wonder, then, that he did not rise lightly, not gladly, to the new hope that was before him? How could he even know with any sureness that he might dare to hope?

Thorhilda was quite aware of the fact that

she had not given him one particle of encouragement, yet there were moments when she felt more than half-inclined to blame him for doubt, for vacillation ; and these moments came usually when she was feeling with a dread akin to terror that her time for vacillation was now growing perilously short. Day by day she discerned more clearly in the manner of almost everyone about her—her aunt Milicent, Mrs. Meredith, Percival himself—that her decision, one way or the other, must be made soon—her binding, irrevocable decision.

Yet, despite this previous sense of preparation, the moment came suddenly. She felt, she hardly knew how, that a net had been drawn about her.

For days past there had been a sort of uncomfortable electricity in the air. The ostensible cause of this was a dinner-party to be given at Yarburgh Rectory on the 22nd of November. It was to be a large party, almost unprecedentedly large ; many of the guests were to come from afar, many to stay all night.

‘It is due to Percy as well as to you,

clear, to make an occasion of it,' Mrs. Godfrey had said gently.

And Thorhilda, understanding in a strange, surprised sort of way, had made no reply save such as was conveyed by a hot, sudden blush, a pained glance, and a hasty retirement to her own room. . . . More than ever Mrs. Godfrey was pleased with her own little diplomacies.

It was on that same evening that Percival Meredith came in quite accidentally. Miss Theyn, altogether unsuspicious, had been persuaded by her aunt to dress a little earlier than usual, and had come down to find Mr. Meredith there in the drawing-room alone. There was no lamplight as yet, only the bright cheerful glow of the fire, the ruddy warmth lighting up even the farthest corners of the wide artistically-decorated room.

For a second Thorhilda showed her embarrassment; then she came forward with a dignity, a self-possession that Percival Meredith admired even while feeling almost overpowered by it. It was very natural that there should be a moment's pause between the two; and it would have been difficult to say which was the first to recover.

It was Percival Meredith who spoke first.

‘It may seem a crude thing to say, perhaps almost cruel,’ he began, in tones not free from tremulousness, ‘but do you know I am almost glad that the time before us is so brief. We have only a few minutes, but surely, since we understand each other so well, have understood each other so long, *one* minute might be enough. . . . I have so little to say that you do not know. It has all been said so often, so long ago. . . . and, and *do* admit it, Hilda dear, I have been so patient. . . . I won’t even yet say that my patience has come to an end ; it could never do that while there was any hope at all. . . . But surely you won’t strain it any longer ! I have *insisted* that no pressure should be put upon you by others ; I have demanded *that* from your aunt and from my mother ceaselessly. I have entreated them to let me have my own way : assuring them that I understood you better than they could do. . . . You will justify my speaking so strongly, so emphatically — I know you will. The love I have for you in my own heart tells me that you will do that. . . . I don’t yet feel elated in any way, still

less triumphant ; do you know, it seems to me as if I could never for a moment feel any real elation in the matter. I must always, however happy I may be, still feel subdued in my happiness, I may almost say humiliated, because of my unworthiness. . . . Don't think that I am speaking untruly, or exaggerating what I feel ; at least tell me that you have no thought of that kind.'

'I have not,' Thorhilda replied, speaking truly.

And in that moment she had no reason for doubting anything that Mr. Meredith had said. Doubt, suspicion, was not natural to her at any time ; and in this moment of perturbation it was not likely that she should suddenly put on or acquire such undesirable qualities as these.

Yet she could not, even now, say the word that was asked of her. The timepiece on the mantelshelf pointed to three minutes to seven. Her uncle was always punctual, only putting down the Bible or Prayer-book he held in his hand when the last moment came. This both Thorhilda and Percival Meredith knew.

'Then if you have no doubt of me,'

Percival urged, coming nearer to her, taking her hand in a warm loving grasp, 'if you do not doubt me, if you do not doubt my love, what *can* hinder you from saying the one word I want?'

There was a footstep on the stair, a bell ringing in the hall; then the door opened behind them, and Redshaw entered with the lamp.

'I will write to you—I will write to-night,' Thorhilda said in a hurried whisper as Mrs. Godfrey entered the room by the further door.

'*And your letter will contain a definite answer?*' Percival Meredith urged in tones not less fervid than her own.

'Yes, yes.'

'*You will say yes or no; please, promise me this!*'

Before Thorhilda could reply, Mrs. Godfrey was there between them, her purple satin gown with all its ribbons and laces rustling impressively; a hand was held out in congratulation to each, her eyes were bright with ready sympathetic tears.

'It is settled, it is all settled and decided!' she began, almost sobbing in her emotion.

Thorhilda had no heart to undeceive her ; nay, now she had no desire. It would be decided so soon, and surely, surely, it must be as her aunt Milicent was thinking.

Very naturally Percival Meredith had no wish to interpose. He felt that the chain was being tightened precisely in the direction he wished. And there was good advice in the old proverb, ‘ Let well alone.’

CHAPTER XL.

A NIGHT OF QUESTIONING.

THE more insight a man acquires into human nature, the more it seems possible to him that a human life may be lived from the cradle to the grave without once even for one whole hour having been seriously brought face to face with any serious human problem.

Thorhilda Theyn imagined that she had faced many problems, and, as we have seen, her life was no thoughtless, careless life. Her character had always been a more or less perplexing and contradictory one. Her uncle Godfrey, discerning the inconsistencies of her temperament while she was yet quite young, had done his utmost to bring about certain changes, certain developments which should tend to a greater harmony, and his efforts had been by no means unavailing. The very

difficulty he had had, the mere fact that he had watched over so many struggles, noted so many small conquests, witnessed the growth of such a sweet affectionateness, the dawning and increasing of an intellect so clear, so full of fine perception, the strengthening of all impulses toward things good and right and pure and true, the very fact that it had been his duty, his pleasure, thus to watch over her, to endeavour to influence her, had drawn the bond of affectionate relationship closer and closer between them. No father or daughter could have been nearer to each other, or dearer. Yet the Canon had never allowed his tenderness to blind him. He knew of the struggle that was going on now ; it may be that he understood its true nature better than Thorhilda herself did. And if he said but little, he prayed the more, not dreaming how his prayer was to be answered.

Percival Meredith stayed to dinner that evening, declaring that he had not intended it, in proof of which he glanced toward his morning coat ; and when, after dinner, Thorhilda and her aunt entered the drawing-room

together, arm-in-arm, they found Gertrude Douglas there—a thing that often happened—she was always made welcome.

‘It must be so dreadfully dull for her at home,’ Mrs. Godfrey would remark to her husband. ‘And with all her talent for sociability, it seems such a pity that she should be buried night after night the winter through in that most dingy of little parlours.’

‘But the father and mother!’ the Canon said suggestively.

‘Ah, they have lived their life! Gertrude is not, unhappily, very young; but all her life, her true life, is yet to live. . . . Oh, I think of her often! There is no one in all this neighbourhood suitable for her; and when Thorda is happily settled I shall certainly try to do something for Gertrude—take her to some southern watering-place for a couple of months, or even go abroad with her. . . . There is no one else to do anything to help her; and if she was as attractive as Circe herself, she could not round the chances of her life in a neighbourhood like this. . . . And she is so clever, so charming, so amiable

—oh ! I *must* turn my attention to her when this is over.’

It was not often that Canon Godfrey said a severe thing, or aught that had even the shadow of severity about it. But his eyes were not closed.

‘I have no wish to interfere for one moment with one kindly intention of yours, my dear Milicent,’ he replied ; ‘but I have a firm impression that Miss Douglas is quite equal to taking care of herself. It seems to me even probable that if she had been less evidently equal, less effort had been needed on the part of her friends. . . . Most men like to do what I did myself—to discover for themselves the goodness, the truth, the real beauty of character of the woman they would *choose* for their wife. . . . Nothing distresses me so much as to think of effort being made, even of the slightest, to interfere with absolute freedom of choice—if, indeed, that is the right word—but it is not. True men, true women have no choice in the matter. It is almost a vulgarism in these days to say that marriages are made in heaven ; my feeling certainly is this, that the happiest and highest marriages

are not *made* at all—they are the result of most inevitable laws. One feels that *this* had to be; this, and no other.’

‘Ah, well! you are a little Quixotic, dear; you always were in such matters as these—not that I have thought any the less of you for that.’

The Canon understood Miss Douglas better than his wife did; and yet even he did not comprehend her shallow nature to its last widening ring. On this evening she was a little perturbed by something that had happened at home; and her perturbation took the form it often did, making itself evident in a restless, glittering, fascinating excitement of word and manner. For an hour or so after the two gentlemen had come back to the drawing-room she took the lead in conversation, and her uncertainly-directed effort was not unsuccessful. Part of the time she walked up and down the room, declaring herself utterly unable to sit still.

‘I know what you must be thinking of me,’ she said laughingly, as she turned once more, her rose-coloured dress shining as she came nearer the lamp, the large and fine outlines of

her figure showing to more and more advantage. 'I know what you must be thinking. I once read a novel, years ago—it seemed to me stupid and antiquated even then; now I believe that it, and the set it belongs to, are all the fashion among people of culture. I haven't any culture, I never had, and therefore I don't admire "*Pride and Prejudice*," nor any other of Miss Austen's novels. Yet I will say this—you can't forget them! Just now myself reminded myself of a certain scene: A young lady, a Miss Bingley, is walking about a drawing-room one evening, and the gentleman to whom her attentions are directed perceives that she has a good figure, and has taken this method of displaying it. I never get up to walk about for five minutes without thinking of that scene.'

'A proof of the graphic forcefulness of Miss Austen's writing,' Canon Godfrey interposed.

'And yet, Uncle Hugh,' Thorhilda replied, 'with the exception of the characters of Emma Woodhouse and Anne Elliot, there are not many characters one would care to choose as patterns in life; and Emma is as charming by reason of her faults as of her virtues. The

whole atmosphere of Miss Austen's novels is full of a charm all her own ; yet surely it is not so very elevating, not so very full of incentive to live and move by the highest standard of all. For instance, everyone in marrying, or, in giving in marriage, thinks first of a decent settlement.'

'That is precisely why and where I *can* admire her novels,' Gertrude Douglas broke in, cutting in two the very sentence in which Thorhilda had meant to explain something of her own ideal—perhaps to the benefit of more than one listener present there.

'That characteristic of her books would alone be sufficient to win me to her side,' Miss Douglas declared, with an openness of revelation meant to be enchanting, but which was more or less of a shock to at least one listener. 'It is the merest hypocrisy to declare that poverty may be preferable to wealth, and we all of us know it—that is, all of us to whom the word "poverty" brings any meaning whatever. But what do you know of it, Thorda dear? What can you ever know? . . . I don't want to speak of myself—it is not good taste, I am aware. . . .

But in all your life you have never suffered so much as I have done this week because one of my father's two farms is unlet and he cannot find a tenant.'

And then even Miss Douglas's fine powers of self-sustenance gave way in a slight measure. She still continued to walk to and fro between the lamplight and the shade; but only those who watched her closely could see the tears that heightened the lustre of her bright eyes, the quivering that deepened the pathos of her beautiful mouth.

'I know you are friends, all of you,' she continued by-and-by, with most pathetic tones in her liquid and musical voice. 'If you had not been, I could not have spoken so. . . . And I have said nothing—*nothing* of all that I might have said, of all that even this seemingly slight matter means to me. . . . I would not have spoken at all but for your sake, Thorda dear, that you might feel to the full how happy you are, what splendid reasons you have for being happy!'

Thorhilda was sitting upon the sofa by her aunt's side; she was soon overcome by this unusual display of emotion. Percival Mere-

dith, sitting opposite to her, staring into the glowing fire, seemed lost in a very mist of perplexity. He hardly dared to lift his eyes to the tearful face of Miss Douglas ; yet, for the first time, her voice sounded strangely winning in his ears, strangely charged with some new spell of enchantment. Was this indeed the voice he had listened to so often? Were these the tones he had heard with such indifference?

There were no signs of any further breaking down on the part of Miss Douglas ; yet by-and-by Thorhilda drew her away to her own room, where a cheery fire was burning, with an easy-chair pushed forward to the fender, a pale blue dressing-gown laid ready, with fur-lined slippers, cashmere shawl, and tiny gipsy-table with its tray of lovely china all prepared for the last cup of hot chocolate. Brushes were spread out upon the toilette-table, hot water ready in the cans, a maid was waiting in the dressing-room that was between Thorhilda's room and the one occupied by Miss Douglas.

Gertrude Douglas understood all that was to be decided that night to the full—perhaps

even better than Miss Theyn herself understood.

Was it *only* during the last few hours that a new and strange idea had taken possession of Gertrude's mind and heart?

Had the uplifted face, the admiring eyes, the expression of deep sympathy she had discerned while watching Percival Meredith ought to do with the attitude she displayed now? Thorhilda was instantly aware of change.

‘Do think of it all, dear—do think seriously,’ Miss Douglas begged, seating herself in the depth of the easiest of easy-chairs, and sinking back exhausted with the contending emotions of the evening. ‘Do *think*! It is not a matter of life and death, but it is all-important so far as life is concerned. Have courage, dear. If you *cannot* love him as you feel you ought to love your future husband, *do* dare to say so! . . . And if there should be anyone else—I don't mean anyone in particular—but if there *should* be, do not let anything that I have said come between you. After all, wealth or poverty, what is it? It is only for this life, dear!’

For almost the first time the ring of—not falseness, but of the want of certain coherent sincerity, smote upon the heart and brain of Thorhilda as an outward blow had done. She raised her head from Miss Douglas's knee, said 'good-night' in a kind of stupor, and went to her own room, dispensing with the services of her maid for that night.

For awhile she sat alone, not caring to take off even the few ornaments she had worn, but resting her wearied head upon the sofa before the fire.

'Lonely!' she said, in the half-audible whisper that people use who are roused by deep emotion. 'Lonely! How anyone might smile to hear me utter the word! The one intimate friend with which circumstance has provided me is in the next room; the two kindest guardians that ever woman had are in the room below; and the one man whom I know does love me greatly is not half a dozen miles away. . . . Yet, *yet*, I am as lonely as the loneliest woman in the world!'

Presently she rose to her feet, and began walking up and down the room; and when her eye caught sight of her writing-table, the

paper lying ready, the pens in admired disorder, everything seeming to await that one word she had promised to write, she felt impelled all at once to a new level of thought and emotion.

Was it possible that she had yet a decision to make? No, that could not be! . . . Yet she might still unmake one—one made rather by others than by herself.

It was a terrible hour.

A more passionately - loving woman, or one aroused to a deeper depth of passionate human loving, had known no such inner contention.

She had only been partially aware of the betrayal of which Damian Aldenmede had been guilty that night in the coastguardsman's cottage, and it was not in her nature to dwell upon an accidental word wrung from a man by the sight of a woman's suffering.

She had never at any time dwelt much upon the idea that the artist might care for her, nor was she a woman to linger in long reverie over such a possibility. She had been drawn to him—drawn by his superiority

over every other man she had met—and she had been fully aware of the fact that he had reciprocated to the full whatever feeling of mere admiration she had given to him. Beyond that she had not *consciously* permitted her thought, her emotion to stray. How far she might be governed by things of which she was largely unconscious she could not know. We none of us know. We are influenced by motives we have never suspected, led by hopes we have never grasped, deluded by visions into which we have never looked. So it is that men find themselves on the edge of precipices from which they start back aghast, like travellers coming to the cliff-top in the thick white mist of autumn evenings. It is well for the traveller who has firm and safe land behind him to retreat upon.

All complications, all pressures notwithstanding, Thorhilda Theyn knew that up to this hour safety was hers. Yet she did not say to herself, as she might have done, that by one strong wrench she might break every strand of the fine network of circumstance by which she was enmeshed.

Of a dozen people knowing the truth as to the battle she fought alone in her own room that night, it is possible that while six might have blamed her, the other six would certainly have been found sad for pity.

It must be remembered that she was still young. Where is the man or woman who has passed from childhood to middle age without making some grievous mistakes? Who has known nothing of love's treachery?—of the betrayal of that love which 'was not love at all,' but yet came with all fair and plausible seeming and promise of love?

And Thorhilda Theyn was not only young. Notwithstanding a certain adequate intellectual development, she was still simply and singularly youthful in many ways; almost impossibly youthful. In the matter of love, and all love's mystic meaning, she was little more than a child.

The little she did know she had been told, and that not too wisely. Had she known the truth with regard to herself that night, she would have known that the real love of her heart had yet to be truly awakened.

Yet so long, so persistently had her aunt

Milicent, whom she trusted to the uttermost, seemed to consider her love for Percival Meredith a settled thing, that hardly one thought of question on this head seemed to rise up to confront her. And it was not only Mrs. Godfrey who had done this grievous thing ; Mrs. Meredith had added her share of the weight of pressure ; Gertrude Douglas—until to-night—had added hers. And of late the Canon had been all but silent—silent with a silence that was one day to be his bitterest memory.

So it was that she was left alone to fight with her worst enemy, herself ; to see on one hand the luxury, the ease, the freedom from care, the presence of every desirable thing that had come to seem needful to her life. There was no need for imagination here. She saw this strong temptation in its highest light, clearly, distinctly.

And why should she look upon it as a temptation at all ? why not accept all that was offered to her in the spirit in which everyone who surrounded her was expecting her to accept it—as a natural result, a natural consequence ?

In this question and its answer lay all her difficulty. There was only one answer ; and she returned it to herself, shrinking from its full meaning.

‘I have not been able to accept the offer of Percival Meredith’s hand at once, and without hesitation, because I know that in marrying I should wish to feel that my husband was the best man I had ever seen ; the highest-souled I had ever known. I appreciate Mrs. Browning’s utterance on this head to the full :

“Unless you can think when the song is done,
No other is soft in the rhythm ;
Unless you can feel when left by *one*,
That all men else go with him.
Unless you can know when upraised by his breath
That your beauty itself wants proving ;
Unless you can swear, ‘For life, for death !’
Oh, fear to call it loving.”

‘Is it thus with me? *It is not.* But they say, they all say, that this is only natural, that that deeper, intenser love will come. Perhaps it might have done, perhaps it might, if I had never seen any other man, any higher, nobler, greater. And I believe, I admit it to myself now and here, that that other is as much greater in soul as he is

poorer in means. As to whether he cares for me or not, with *that* caring, I do not know, I only dream. Certainly it is nothing but a dream, and one that, perhaps, could never be realized. Of Percival's love I am very sure. And I mean to live as truly as I can, as nobly : but if I fail, shall I not remember ? Shall I not see a strong, spiritual face looking into mine, looking sadly, reproachfully, the face of one who would have led me onward and upward, step by step ?

Then for awhile thought itself seemed to pause ; and the visions that came were not such as to fix themselves on the mind by means of formed words and phrases. And each vision seemed to be twofold, to disclose now this side, now that. At last quite suddenly, as day began to break, worn and wearied with the night's perplexity, Thorhilda threw herself on the sofa by her writing-table and began to write.

'I will think no more, I will hesitate no more,' she said to herself in some agitation. 'I will give my promise to Percival Meredith, and my life to God. . . May He do with me as He will.'

The note was written in the gray dawn ; then Miss Theyn slept awhile, to be awakened by a very hurricane of wind and rain dashing upon her casement ; and even then it seemed as if at the foot of the far-off cliffs she could hear the sounding of the sleepless melancholy sea.

‘ Not the sort of morning one would have chosen to make one’s first greeting to “ a plighted bride,” isn’t that the proper phrase, dear ? ’ her aunt Milicent said an hour or two later when Thorda went down. The cheeriest and warmest of coal fires was burning in the wide grate, lighting up the dining-room with a ruddy glow. Mrs. Godfrey kissed the girl with a warm and motherly kiss on either cheek ; the Canon’s lips were pressed tenderly to her forehead ; and he held her hand awhile, not caring to look much into the face he had read at the first glance.

Presently a bell was rung, the servants came in, and sat down quietly in their places, and the Canon opened his Bible and read :

‘ The light of the body is the eye : if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

‘ No man can serve two masters : for either he will hate the

one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

‘ Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment ?

* * * * *

‘ Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.’

CHAPTER XLI.

‘LATE, LATE, SO LATE!’

‘At peace ! ay, the peace of the ocean,
When past is the storm when we foundered,
And eager and breathless the morning
Looks over the waste.’

W. W. STORY.

A DINNER-PARTY of eight-and-twenty people must always mean the mingling of some very different, not to say discordant, elements ; and the party given in honour of Miss Theyn’s engagement to Mr. Percival Meredith could be no exception to this interesting rule.

The scene—taking it merely as a scene—was an unusually brilliant one. Certainly—

‘The tabours played their best,
Lamps above and laughs below.’

And perhaps some present there might afterward have finished the quotation—

"Love me" sounded like a jest,
Fit for yes, or fit for no."

But Miss Theyn could not be numbered among them. Long afterward it was remarked that she had never looked more beautiful, more winning, more touching, more sad. Many there did not see the sadness. Her quietude was taken for maiden modesty ; her wistful, wondering look for the new tenderness always born of love. She moved about the rooms like a very embodiment of grace and beauty, of sweetness, and almost pathetic gentleness. Mr. Egerton ('the Canon's curate,' as Mrs. Kerne was careful always to describe him), watching Miss Theyn on this eventful evening, knew that he had never before seen such outward and visible signs of the inward and beautiful grace of humility. It was not only the down-dropt eyes, the restrained smile, the new paleness ; but something in her smile, her grace, her attitude, betrayed to him that all this demonstration of gaiety and festivity, so well and kindly intended, so far as the Canon and his wife were concerned, was not exactly in accord with the inward mood of

her for whom it was mainly meant. Mr. Egerton could not quite understand his own feeling. Where all should have been joy, gladness, congratulation, he was moved, all unaware of any reason, to something that was curiously like pity, strangely akin to compassion. And inevitably Miss Theyn discerned how it was with him, and returned the pressure of his hand with a gentle, meaning warmth that he could not forget. Afterward—long, long afterward he understood.

‘Everybody was there!’ Mrs. Kerne said, describing the evening to a friend of hers on the following day. ‘An’ it was the prettiest dinner-party I ever was at. The dresses was splendid—they really was. My niece Thorhilda wore a cream satin, very plain, very simply made, but very good. It was like an old brocade for that; it would ha’ stood by itself splendid. An’ she’d some magnificent old lace all about it, real Brussels, ’at had belonged to Mrs. Godfrey’s mother; *she* was a cousin of the Duke of St. Dunstan’s; that was how the father, old Chalgrove, got the living; and how it came to pass ’at the Duke an’ Duchess took such notice of them all.

Why, I don’t believe ’at the eddication o’ that family o’ girls ever cost the father sixpence. . . . An’ so far so good; but they needn’t hold their heads quite so high as they do; though I must say ’at I consider Mrs. Godfrey a real lady, down to the toes of her shoes. An’ that’s more nor I’d ever say for Averil Chalgrove.’

‘But you don’t mean to say that *she* was there?’ inquired Mrs. Kerne’s interlocutor, who was none other than Mrs. Monk-Fryston, the wife of the principal lawyer of Market Yarburgh,

‘*There!* my dear; yes, and with all her war-paint on, I can assure you. And truth to say, she amazes me! She’s forty-seven, if she’s a day; and you’d never ha’ taken her for much over thirty. Would you believe it, she’d a cream lace dress on; and all tossed off wi’ splendid dark red chrysanthemums. An’ she’d a great diamond pendant at her throat, half as big again as that ’at poor Kerne gave £60 for the day we’d been married twenty year. She’s none a favourite o’ mine, she’s over proud an’ stiff for that; but I’m bound to say she *looked* every inch a lady,

an' behaved like one. They *do* do that, them Chalgroves.'

'But who else was there? You have told me nothing yet.'

'Oh, there's none so much to tell. One dinner-party's very much like another. The rooms looked beautiful; the lamps had splendid shades, so had the candles; and the flowers was beyond all description. A lot o' them came from abroad; I got that out of Mrs. Godfrey herself. An' then the music made such a difference—— Oh me; if I was a grand lady I'd allus hev music at dinner-time.'

'But who played? surely not any of the guests?'

Mrs. Kerne paused a moment, quite a pitiful look mingling with the look of superior understanding on her face.

'Who played? why the band played, to be sure; the Volunteer band from Danesborough.'

'Oh, really! But wasn't it very loud?'

'Loud? not a bit of it. At first, in fact, we couldn't hear 'em at all. The Canon had asked 'em to play in the courtyard at the

back of the Rectory. An’ by-an’-by Mrs. Godfrey appealed to me—’twas very nice an’ polite of her really—“Mrs. Kerne,” she says, “can you hear the band? What do you think? Had we better hev’ it a little nearer? Would it be *too* near in the ante-room, d’ ya think?”

‘So I said no. I thought it ’ud be a deal better; so she sends a message by the butler, an’ within five minutes the band was playing just in the next room, so soft, so beautiful, so overcomin’ ’at you could hardly help the tears, specially not when they played “Home, Sweet Home,” and the “Last Rose o’ Summer.” Believe me, I put down my knife an’ fork upon the finest bit o’ partridge! I couldn’t ha’ eaten it wi’ my heart swellin’ so, --no I couldn’t; though I don’t make out ’at I’m one of the softest-hearted sort o’ folk. Still, there’s moments, I reckon, there’s moments i’ most lives, an’ that was one, certainly that was one!’

‘But you’ve not told me yet who the main part of the guests were!’ Mrs. Monk-Fryston said with a little querulousness. She had not the suave manner of your true interviewer. But

then, the interviewer is like the poet—born, not made.

‘Oh, I’ve no list of ’em,’ Mrs. Kerne replied, in a manner meant to be grand, but which was only rude and brusque. ‘I’ve no list of ’em; an’ titles don’t dazzle *me*, as they do some folk. I saw no more in Lord Hermeston than I did in the Canon, maybe not so much. An’ as for Sir Robert an’ Lady Sinnington, well, if it weren’t for the title I reckon they’d never be received into no first-rate society.’

‘You don’t say so! . . . But Lady Thelton now, wasn’t she there?’

‘Of course she was ; no party at the Rectory would be complete without *her*. And very handsome and stylish she looked with her rubies, and her point lace, and her dark red velvet dress. . . . But I make nought of all that! What did take me, was her real politeness. She spoke to me about the engagement as feelingly as if my niece had been my own daughter. In truth, altogether, I was struck with the way in which everybody seemed to be interested. In point of fact, it was a real sensation ; an’ so *he* seemed to think. As for her—my niece—well, I must say she was

more like a white marble statue than a girl just engaged to be married. And with all these grand folks about her; and all makin’ so much to do, I didn’t, at the bottom of my heart, think it was quite nice of her. But then she was always one o’ that sort, sweet anuff, an’ nice anuff in her own way—but then, her way *was* her own, an’ it was a little bit “stuck up,” as the sayin’ goes; but if I didn’t altogether like it, *I’d* no need to give in to it; an’ I never did. Yet, I’ll do her the justice to say as she never resented it, never bore me no ill-will. She was as sweet last night as if we’d allus been the best friends in the world. She’s no bitterness about her.’

‘And Mr. Aldenmede, the artist, wasn’t *he* there? I’ve heard more than one say that he had ideas about Miss Theyn himself. They’ve been seen talkin’ on the beach over and over again.’

Mrs. Kerne’s smile was wonderful to see, it was so superior, so pitiful, so full of never-to-be-explained meaning.

‘*Him* have ideas! No doubt. But if my niece isn’t very sharp, she’s not quite a fool!’

An' as for him bein' asked to dine at the Rectory on such an occasion as that—well, it wasn't very likely.'

Such was the terrible drift of the gossip that was circulating almost everywhere. It was well for Thorhilda that she did not even dream of it.

She had made her choice ; she would abide by it—so she was determining while everyone about her was congratulating her on the happiness of her choice.

For some days she avoided any moment of calm reflection, and this of set purpose. Miss Douglas was asked to come and stay at the Rectory, to occupy the room next to Thorhilda's ; and each night the last, worst moments were passed in conversation that seldom came near the one matter predominant above all others in Thorhilda's heart and soul. It was strange, and Gertrude Douglas knew it to be strange, that she was hardly permitted to mention the name of Percival Meredith.

' You are so different from me, dear,' she said one night as she sat by Thorhilda's fire, her long, pretty brown hair flowing over her pale pink flannel dressing-gown, her dark,

bright eyes alight with interest, with curiosity. 'You are so different from me! If I loved anyone, I think I should wish always to be near them, or at any rate always near to some one who would talk to me of the one I loved. And you—you seem to shrink if I mention Mr. Meredith's name! Why is it? Do you know why? Are you conscious of it at all yourself!'

Thorhilda was silent for a moment—silent and even paler than usual.

'I think I am only conscious so far,' she said at last. 'It seems now such a terrible matter; for life or for death. There is no escape.'

'Escape! My dear child, what an odd word to have in your head! Escape from Percival Meredith! from Ormston Magna! from nearly three thousand a year! My dear, cautious-speaking old father says two thousand five hundred. And you speak of escape! My child, are you insane?'

'I am not sure,' Thorhilda said slowly. 'I am not sure! You are putting words to thoughts that have been in my mind for some time. What is sanity—pure, clear,

human sanity? . . . I am not so sure that I know !

This was beyond Miss Douglas ; she laughed a low, sweet, empty laugh, drew Thorhilda down to the sofa by the fire, and held her younger friend's hand affectionately in her own.

‘Don't tempt Providence, dear,’ she said with sufficient solemnity. ‘I am not an envious person—if I were, I should envy you from the bottom of my heart. It seemed to me that you have everything any human being could wish for. You have a good home—I might say a luxurious one ; but I know that that would pain you ; you have the kindest of kind friends ; and now, to crown all, the Prince comes by. He throws himself at your feet ; and after long enough probation, you bid him rise and allow him to kiss the tips of your fingers. Having done that, you put on a melancholy air as if the sacrifice were too much for you.’

All this was far too near the truth to be quite pleasant ; and it was small wonder that Miss Theyn avoided such conversation as much as was possible. Yet she could not

avoid the growing sense of being bound, irrevocably bound.

'I suppose it is always so,' she said to herself one night, standing alone by the window of her own room.

It was a clear, calm, moonlit night. The trees in the garden stood still and gray, the mystic interweaving of the leafless branches showing against the silver-toned ether beyond. It was a night, a scene, to compel the soul to be truthful to itself, however painful such truth might be; and Thorhilda Theyn could not escape from that compelling influence.

'I suppose it is so with all thinking women,' she said. 'To have given one's self to another must be to know one's self poorer for the gift! How strange it is to be called upon to surrender one's very identity. It is certainly fitting and typical that one should lose one's very name. And to be congratulated, felicitated on every hand as if it were the greatest good that had come to one—a good with no drawback, a gain with no loss! Is that why the whole thing is smothered in finery and the tawdriest of outward show—that a

woman may not think—that she may be dazzled by the millinery of the whole affair to such an extent that she may not have time to think of the hereafter? Is this what marriage means? Is this the highest? Is this the best?’

This time of storm and stress lasted for some days after the irrevocable word had been given; but naturally it wore itself out. It is seldom given to human nature to remain long upon the mountain peak of any emotion whatever.

Preparations for the marriage were being hurried forward; in one way or another, things connected with the approaching change in her life came to the surface every hour. Did she need a new gown, or pair of boots? She was reminded that it would be better to wait a little while—a very little—then to choose this for travelling, that for receptions, and so forth. She was never allowed to forget.

Percival Meredith came and went. He was quiet, happy, never visibly triumphant, or over-assured to any offensive degree. He understood too well for that. He sat on the

sofa in the Rectory drawing-room, rather silent, well-bred, distinguished-looking, waiting upon Thorhilda’s lightest word, letting no wish or desire of hers escape him. Yet he was never obtrusive, never forward, or *exigeant*.

Mrs. Godfrey marvelled a little at them both. Were these lovers—these two reticent, self-contained people, who spoke of the ‘weather and the crops,’ ‘Shakespeare and the musical glasses,’ with such perfect equanimity? The Rector’s wife was even a little impatient at times. Being so full of life, and of all life’s minor enthusiasms, herself, it chafed her to watch the unmoved bearing of two people who should have been—so to speak—electric with sympathy, with emotion; who should have rarefied the very atmosphere about them with the fervidness, the intensity of their affection.

‘Well,’ she said one day to Gertrude Douglas, who was full of understanding as to this perplexing state of things. ‘Well, I suppose we are not made alike; but when I remember the last few weeks before my own marriage, and then look at Thorda, I am all

bewilderment. Looking back upon myself, upon the state of exaltation I was in, and then turning to watch her—her perfect self-control, her unbroken quietness, her uneager manner, her unfervid glance—I cannot, I *cannot* but dread that all this means indifference. . . . Why should she be so hard to move? She is not cold-hearted—anything but that. Indeed I have always felt that somewhere in her nature there must be a most passionate intensity of lovingness. I had hoped to see it come to the surface now ; I felt sure of it. Yet day by day I wait and watch, and the day ends in disappointment.'

'Yet she isn't reserved with one,' Miss Douglas said musingly.

'Reserved! No, not exactly that ; nor exactly open. The reserve is somehow thrown upon one's self. I do not—I do not *dare* to speak the simple truth ; I do not *dare* to question her, to remonstrate with her. What is there that one could take hold of? She receives Percival with all kindness, all politeness! If she would but once be a little rude, a little brusque, one would dare to speak.'

‘ But that she will never be,’ said Gertrude Douglas, who fell again into that unusual mood of absent-mindedness ; and was not again to be aroused out of it during the whole of the afternoon. What new and forcible idea had taken possession of her, who should say ?

CHAPTER XLII.

‘SOMEWHERE THERE MUST BE LIGHT.’

‘The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,
I do give lost, for I do feel it gone.’

SHAKESPEARE.

OUTWARDLY Barbara's life was going on much as it had always done ; but the changes of which she never spoke were not small, not unimportant.

It was no light matter to have an infant to care for in addition to the four children she had cared and toiled for before. True, the neighbours were good, and any fishwife on the Forecliff would take ‘Bab's Ildy’ for a few hours while Barbara went, as of old, to the flither-beds, or sat at the herring-house ‘scaling mussels,’ or ‘baiting lines,’ or mending nets, or doing any of the hundred and one things by which the wives and daughters of

the fishermen earn a little money to help in the providing of the household needs. There was no other house on the Forecliff where the burden of providing for a family fell upon a girl not yet twenty.

Bab had never before suffered much from the narrowness of her narrow means. She had never known anything else. Economy of the closest had been familiar to her from her very childhood. To have a dinner—and that a scanty one—of animal food once a week, on a Sunday usually, was all that she had ever dreamed of.

And Bab had had no lessons in cooking ; she had never seen a scientific scale of diet ; she knew nothing of the various values of various foods. That albumen should not be hardened ; that osmazome should be retained ; that ‘ body-warmers,’ and ‘ flesh-formers ’ should be given in about equal quantities —alas ! all this was unknown to Barbara Burdas ; yet she did her best, obeying instinct, which goes for something, and tradition, which is worth less, but yet is binding when no other light or law is known.

The wonder of it was that Bab herself had always had such splendid health ; her complexion was bright and clear, the carmine tints of it full and vivid ; her deep blue eyes were as lustrous and as beautiful as if her diet had been regulated by a whole college of physicians. And it was the same with the little ones. The three lads, rude, robust, seemed likely to suffer far more from plethora than from inanition ; and if little Ailsie's more delicate frame caused greater fear, greater perplexity, this was not shared by any who knew the sacrifice that Bab was even now making.

Over and over, a few pence at a time, she had saved enough to buy this book or that, usually one lent to her by Damian Aldenmede, but which in her natural independence she had declined to keep.

‘ I have kept so many,’ she said one evening. ‘ Why, there's over twenty on the shelf upstairs ; an' your shelves, in your own room, look as bare as can be. It fairly made my heart ache to see them.’

‘ It need not,’ Aldenmede replied quite carelessly. ‘ I have some other shelves at home, not badly filled.’

Again Bab had looked into his face with that questioning look he knew so well, and which amused him so deeply. Some time he would satisfy her questions by an answer he liked to think of. Meanwhile he found a rather cruel amusement in raising her wonder, her interest, and then watching how she forbore to ask a single question in words that could betray curiosity. Already he was proud of Bab.

But yet how little, how very little, he knew of her real life! He had acquaintance enough with the interior arrangements of the cottage on the Forecliff not to intrude when the mid-day meal was on the table. How he might have shivered to see six people enjoying a dish made of the boiled udder of a cow ; of a gaunt and spare salted cod's head ; and yet the dishes were, in their way, nourishing ; witness the boys, whose hardy, rosy cheeks might have made many a richer mother envious ! And almost each evening came a supper that might be more nourishing still. Bab seldom failed to prepare a big kettle of rice boiled in the quart of skim milk which she could purchase for three-ha'pence ; or to

fill the big frying-pan with potatoes and onions, and a scrap of good salted fish if she could get it. It is certain that there were children on the Forecliff worse fed than those brought up by poor, ignorant Bab Burdas.

But it was for little Ailsie, and Nan's baby, that time after time her hoard of money, one shilling or two, had to be taken to buy better food—now a tin of costly-seeming farinaceous food for little Ildy (named Thorhilda in the register of the parish church at Yarburgh, but never again till a recent event in her girl-life demanded it). And now the shilling or the sixpence was taken to buy a real mutton-chop; or a few ounces of real port wine for her little sister who was always so quiet, so pale, yet so bright, so good, so full of small childish sympathies.

It was only by watching, by slowly and silently watching, that David Andoe came to discern what it really meant to Bab to have the charge of his sister's child; and his instinct led him to perceive that no offer of help on his part would be welcome. Once or twice he had called to see Nan's baby; he had bent over the cradle where the little one lay sleep-

ing; not only in quietness and cleanliness, but with some attempt at daintiness all about her. Barbara told him that Miss Theyn had sent the swing-cot, with all its pretty chintz draperies, its loops and bows of rose-red ribbon. A small white counterpane covered the warm blanket. The little Ildy lay smiling upon the soft pillow; happy, comfortable as the veriest princess of a baby might have been. Bab's pride was touching to see.

David smiled and sighed both in a breath as he watched the child. How did Barbara manage to do all her own work, and yet make possible such home-life as this? The Sagged House was but very little better furnished than his own home; yet, ah, the difference!

Here the brick floor was clean and wholesome—at home it was so foul that no one might say whether it was brick or stone. Here the old oaken dresser with its blue plates, its suspended cups and jugs, was a pleasant thing to contemplate; at home hardly a piece of crockery-ware was to be found that was not dirty, or cracked, or actually broken. And then under the dresser Barbara had ranged her copper tea-kettle, her bright brass

pans, her brass candlesticks—heirlooms these for the most part, and seldom to be used in the common daily life. That Bab was a little proud of them was known all over the Fore-cliff, and helped in some vague way to add to the impression that she was not quite as the other fisher-folk were. David Andoe saw it all again, and again it saddened him to a degree of sadness lower than before. The contrast was too pointed.

There was no pile of ill-smelling nets or lines cumbering the floor here; no dishes of potato-peeling standing about the floor for elderly and ragged-looking fowls to come in and peck at at their pleasure. Even old Ephraim's sou'wester hung in the tiny passage, and his sea-boots stood within the door of the coal-shed outside. Barbara was as sensitive to strong odours as any lady of her land.

David did not enter into any details as he sat there. All that he knew, or rather felt, was that he sat by a home fireside where there was warmth, and order, and peace, and the certain security that comes of the presence of but one human being whose character is

strong, and stable, and pure. This was rest ; this was soothing ! Had hope been there, it had been happiness of the finest.

He could not help speaking out of his full heart. His training had not been such as to lead him on to the finer and more perfect restraints.

‘It’s like bein’ in heaven, Barberie, this is !’ the poor fellow said, in somewhat pathetic tones, as he drew near to the blazing fire. Old Ephraim was nodding in his chair on the other side of the fire ; the children were all in bed and asleep. A lamp burnt clearly and brightly on the table ; Barbara sat by the little cot, her knitting in her hand, the needles plying fast, yet not claiming all her attention. Every moment or two she glanced at the little Ildy, touching the cradle to a light rocking movement if the baby seemed restless, leaving it alone if she slept in peace. Bab had had no training in such matters, but her instinct being kindly—nay, loving—reason served her for the rest.

‘It *is* like heaven,’ David said in a low, touching voice. Barbara quite understood ; and almost trembled in her understanding.

But for awhile, suspending her knitting-needles, she tried to think calmly.

‘I don’t know about *this* bein’ much like heaven,’ she said at last. ‘But, eh, it *does* seem to me that people needn’t make their lives so much like—like the other place, as they so often do! It *is* a mystery.’

‘Ay, so it is—but they do do that.’

‘It’s the want of understanding,’ Barbara replied, looking into the fire thoughtfully. ‘It’s nothing but that—they don’t understand. And how should they? There’s been none to teach them—none that could see the sort of teaching that poor people wanted. They looked down from above, and comprehended nothing that they saw. They didn’t know *why* poor folk’s houses was dirty, nor *why* their bit of food was badly cooked; “repulsive” they would call it, an’ so it is to them. But they couldn’t trace all this to its beginning—how should they? All they could do was to blame, and blame, and never see to the root of things. . . . But, eh, me! I’ve hope enough! I see signs on every side. Why, the very books one reads gives one hope ’at they’re beginning to see—them that

can help. Oh, yes, believe me, David, there’s hope on every side!’

‘Hope for *some*, maybe, not for me,’ the poor fellow replied, with sadness in his tone. ‘Hope for *some*. May God grant as you’ll be one o’ them!’

Then he rose to go, standing for another moment or two by the cheery fire, lingering another by the dainty little cot where the baby lay smiling on its soft white pillow. It was hard to go, and Barbara, with compassionate soul and warm heart, fully understood, far too fully for her own peace of mind.

‘Don’t be downcast, David,’ she said, speaking kindly, sadly. ‘There’s many a one that has more reason to be downcast than you have.’

Was she meaning herself? Was that possible, considering all that had happened of late? David did not know, he felt bewildered, and by-and-by he went away, leaving Barbara Burdas far more unsettled, more saddened, more perplexed than he himself was. After a difficult quarter of an hour Barbara was glad to hear the familiar click of the latch that betokened the coming of old Hagar

Furniss. It was not only that she needed distraction, some impelling instinct within her required more than that.

‘Come in, Hagar, come to the fire,’ Bab said warmly. ‘It’s cold anuff outside ; but, thank God, we’re able to keep a fire going.’

The old woman began to shed quiet, feeble, ineffectual tears, the tears of age, that have in them no passion, no vehemence, nothing to touch any heart not the most sensitive.

‘It’s well for you, honey,’ she said, sobbing gently, speaking gently. ‘It’s well for you ’at hes a bit o’ coal at the hoose end, an’ a bite bread i’ the cupboard ! ’Tisn’t iverybody can saäy as much.’

‘Why, you don’t mean to say ’at *you’re* wantin’, Hagar ?’ Bab asked, surprised out of her own troubles. But she did not express her true feeling in words. In a very few minutes there was a comfortable meal spread on the table : tea, and toasted bread and butter, and a boiled egg. Poor old Hagar began to eat at once, in that painful, eager, tremulous fashion that betrays long hunger, long faintness, and need. Bab, her own troubles regaining their dominance, only waited to see

the old woman fairly comfortable, fairly satisfied; then, obeying an instinct that was strong within her, she rose to her feet and took out her shawl from the oaken press at the further end of the room, and prepared to go out of doors.

‘You won’t mind, Hagar—you won’t mind my going out for a while. I’ve not been out since the early morning, and I’m keenly set upon walkin’ over the fields for a bit. Can you stay?’

‘Can Ah staäy, honey? . . . Why if Ah *mun* tell the truth Ah were wantin’ to ask ya if Ah mud sleep here, on the mat by the fire? Ah’ve seen neither bite nor sup to-daäy, nor a bit o’ coal—noä niver the lowe of a coal fire till Ah come in here to neet, an’ Ah’d niver ha’ done that but Ah were fairly starvin’! . . . Let ma staäy Bab, honey—let ma sleep here on the mat! Ah’ll do owt Ah can for ya i’ the mornin’. Ah’d be right glad to do a bit o’ washin’—an’ ya mun hev a lot o’ that wiv a young bairn to do for!’

Bab’s only reply was to bring a spare rug and a pillow from her own bed, and to make the old woman quite cozy on the ‘settle’ by the fire.

‘Now lie there till I come back,’ she said. ‘An’ if ya hear any of the little ones stirring, go an’ see what they want. There’s Ildy’s milk by the fire, an’ none o’ them else wants nothing till the morning. Gran’father’ll go to bed at eight o’clock. Don’t wake him before!’

So Bab went out into the cool dark December night. There was no moon—the tiny silver crescent had gone down behind the hills long before ; but the stars shone at their best and brightest, and the world seemed quieter, holier for their far-off shining ; and the sea seemed subdued to a gentler movement ; the land was wrapt as in a peaceful dream. Everywhere there was peace, save in Barbara’s own soul.

She had seemed to herself to be quiet enough till David Andoe, with all his subdued and unsubdued emotion, had awakened the echoes of that love which she had hoped was dying—yet, oh ! so hardly, so very hardly in her own heart. Now she was all unstrung again. The battle had to be fought once more. *Once* more ! How many times more ? Was her life to be spent in this need of love ?

Ah! how many lives are spent—spent exactly thus—in needing love, in craving for it, in trying everywhere to search it out? And one shall find it, and presently lose it again; and another shall find it, and know no good, no beauty in it. How few have life and love, continuance of love—love remaining always for blessing and upraising!

Was Barbara Burdas going to pass her life thus—in hoping, in finding the end of hope? She thought of it in a vague passing way as she flew onward through the lanes beyond the Bight. There was a flagged pathway through the fields, a descent into a fir copse, a hill to be climbed on the other side; and that the top of the hill was a long three miles from the Forecliff, Barbara was very well aware: yet she did not stop to think of the distance; she was thinking of nothing save a dream that was growing gradually in her own brain—a vision of Yarburgh Rectory, with the windows all alight with splendid lamps and glowing fires. So Thomasin Furniss had described it to her once, when some halibut had had to be taken to the Rectory even while the guests were assembled

to eat it. Bab had never forgotten the description of all that Thomasin had seen that evening.

This was no dinner-party, not so far as Barbara knew ; and certainly she did not care. She had no desire, no dream, except that but for a moment she might be near to Miss Theyn. That was the one cry that she would allow her heart to make. All the rest could be stifled, it must be stifled ; but this might be allowed, surely this ! And it would not happen often, perhaps never again ; but surely it might be permitted to her for once, just for once, to walk outside the house where Miss Theyn lived — perhaps even in the garden, if the gates were not shut ! And she might see the window of Miss Theyn's room ; perhaps even know, from the shadow on the blind, that she was dressing for dinner. Bab had learnt much of late.

And all this detail of vision notwithstanding, there was nothing small at the root of Barbara's ideals. The one motive was the drawing to be for a little while near to one she loved.

Forgive her, if even in this mere drawing

there was yet a taint of materialism. It is only the very finest natures of all who can live in love, knowing that this love is growing, strengthening, though actual nearness be not attained for weeks, or months, nay, even for years. The test of time is not only the strongest, it is the most beautiful test of all.

This Barbara had yet to learn in all its truth, all its fulness. She only knew to-night that she was moved to pass over miles of lane and field as if she were but passing over a few yards. Her imagination saw only the quaint gray old house upon the hill-top at Market Yarburgh.

She stood upon the lawn at last. She had found no bolts or bars to prevent her, and she had made her way up the wide avenue as one not dreaming of any right or title to be there. Instantly she found her way to the front of the house, not knowing it to be the front. There was only a light here and there in the upper windows, but on the lower story there was what seemed to Barbara a very illumination from three of the windows, each of which reached to the ground, and, being uncurtained, disclosed the room within.

Bab stood staring awhile, not dazzled so much by the light, not by the strange wonderful beauty, as by the silence, the emptiness of it all. She had not meant to be curious, still less to be a spy upon aught to be seen of the Rectory from without; yet she stood as if spell-bound when once she had discerned that in all this wide magnificence of light, of colour, of beauty, there was no human soul to enjoy. For a time Barbara was bewildered.

At last, as she stood there she saw a door open, far away at the end of the room, and then two ladies entered slowly, gracefully, richly dressed. They came in together, arm-in-arm; the elder lady was bending down toward the younger one, and as they reached the glow of the fire the younger one lifted her face for a kiss—a warm, lovingly-given kiss. Then Bab did not know any more for awhile; but under the evergreen oak opposite to the drawing-room window there was a sound of sobbing, much subdued, yet painful enough had any been there to listen. Barbara was but too sure that no listener was there. All her grief lay in her loneliness.

CHAPTER XLIII.

‘IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE, PLAY ON.’

‘Trust me, no mere skill of subtle power,
No mere practice of a dext’rous hand,
Will suffice without a hidden spirit,
That we may or may not understand.’

A. A. PROCTER.

BARBARA’S tears had been stayed some time, yet she knelt there under the shadow of the tree, quiet, wondering at herself, yet thinking mainly of others. It was a still, clear night; the stars shone and glittered, the outlines of the trees and of the house were distinct against the deep indigo of the sky. For a time hardly a sound broke the silence, save the hooting of a melancholy owl in a tree at the bottom of the garden. Presently even this ceased, leaving a perfect stillness upon the land everywhere. Not a twig was stirred, not a blade of grass quivered, not a bird

moved in its nest with any audible movement. It was a moment when silence itself is a strong impression.

Then all at once that beautiful silence was broken, but broken by a sound so thrilling, so sweet, and to Barbara so strange, that she rose to her feet and stood with clasped hands and uplifted face, as one entranced might have done. What could it be, this beautiful, this ineffably beautiful music?

It may seem strange in these days that Barbara should never have heard the tones of a piano; but so it was. And now that this first experience should come under circumstances so unusual was sufficient to stamp the impression on her mind for ever. She remained standing there for some time; one of the windows of the drawing-room was open; the light from the room was streaming out over the terrace, over the shrubs, over the leafless trees. And somehow the music seemed part of the light, part of all the beauty within and without. Bab had no idea of what the music might be. It seemed like a prayer, like pleading, and confessing, and beseeching. And now there was

agitation in the cry, an excitement that seemed to stir the very air. It was as if she were watching a shipwreck, listening to the cry of drowning women, of children left to perish. Half-unconsciously she drew nearer to the window ; she could see Miss Theyn sitting by the piano, her white hands moving up and down, now slowly and gracefully, now in a quick, impassioned way. Only her profile was visible from where Barbara stood, and Bab could see that she looked pale and sad—sad as the music she was making, which now by degrees was growing sadder than ever, more plaintive, more deeply charged with pain and regret, with loss and trembling and fear. Bab hardly knew that the tears were running down her own face—tears of sympathy, of longing ; and when at last a sob broke from her, a passionate, overwhelming sob that was half a cry, she was startled at least as much as Miss Theyn was, whose fingers stopped suddenly upon the keys in the middle of a soft, sad passage in a Nocturne by Chopin. Bab saw that she had heard, she saw the uplifted, surprised face ; yet she could not move ; she had no wish to move.

‘Go on playing, Thorda dear,’ said a sleepy voice from among the sofa cushions behind the screen.

‘I will begin again presently, Aunt Milicent,’ Thorhilda replied calmly as she came near to the window.

She was not altogether unalarmed, yet she would not betray her alarm yet awhile. Opening the window a little wider she looked out, and saw the dark figure upon the terrace, quite close.

‘Is it anyone I know?’ she asked in a tone so as not to disturb her aunt.

And instantly the answer came :

‘Yes, Miss Theyn, it’s me, Barbara Burdas. Will you forgive me? I never meant to disturb you.’

Thorhilda, discerning the sound of tears in Barbara’s voice, would not ask her to enter the drawing-room.

‘Wait there awhile, will you? I want to see you,’ she replied.

Then she turned and said a few words to her aunt, who was too sleepy to take a very lively interest in her niece’s movements at that moment.

A few seconds later Thorhilda was by Barbara's side, holding her hand, entreating her to come into the house, to her own room; but Barbara was not easily persuaded to this. At last, however, fearing that Miss Theyn might take cold there on the terrace, she yielded. It was a somewhat memorable moment. For the first time Miss Theyn was conscious of a feeling—was it gratitude for devotion? was it affection? was it sympathy? She hardly knew herself; but the sense of being drawn to Barbara was certainly there, and the simple, truthful way in which she said, 'I am glad to see you, Barbara,' as she took the girl's hand again, and led her to her own easy-chair by the fireside, was sufficient to make poor Bab's heart rise and swell for very gladness. No words could have told it all.

'I never thought of this—not for a moment,' Bab said, in English almost as pure as Miss Theyn's own.

The very accent was changed, softened, purified; now and then some inflection stirred Thorhilda strangely, as if it were a disturbing memory. At last she detected the cause of

this ; it was the echo of Damian Aldenmede's way of speaking that she heard, and the detection caused the hot colour to flow over her face and neck in a way that was perplexing to Barbara. Had she said aught that had been taken amiss?

It was a curious hour. Barbara felt the warmth, the softness, the delicate beauty of the room almost as she had felt the music. Did people live thus always? Was this no rare occasion? Was the house always thus—filled with light, and warmth, and loveliness everywhere? The walls of even the landings and staircases seemed almost crowded with pictures; bookcases filled with books seemed to occupy every recess. Lamps hung from the ceiling; white muslin and lace looped back with rose-pink ribbons floated about the windows of Miss Theyn's room; the toilet-table, with all its belongings, seemed a very miracle of artistic arrangement. Was it kept so always? That was the mystery. A thing might be done for once, but to keep up all this refinement of surrounding seemed almost impossible. Yet Bab did not consciously dwell upon these ideas—they came later.

Now she was troubled, and glad, and half-ashamed, and half-enchanted. Was it possible that Miss Theyn was 'glad to see her?'

'I never thought of this,' she repeated, sitting in Thorhilda's little chair, her rich red-gold hair gleaming in the light of lamp and fire, her deep sad blue eyes shining with a new and happy light.

Miss Theyn, sitting opposite to her, watching her wonderful beauty—really wonderful now in the new softness, the new gentleness, the new refinement that had come upon it—watching her thus, she could not but be amazed; and to listen to the words that fell from the fisher-girl's lips was more amazing still. 'Could love, mere love, do so much?'

'Tell me what you did intend?' Miss Theyn said gently. 'I hope you intended to come and see me. Long ago I asked you.'

'So you did; but I never meant to come—not then. No—nor not now in this way. . . . How shall I tell you the truth? I was tired, tired and lonely, and old Hagar came in so

that I could leave the little ones, and all at once I felt as if I *must* come here—as if I must but just look at your house—the home you lived in always, but just outside of it! I had no thought of the distance—none. I wanted to come, to stand for a few minutes, and then go back. But when I heard the music I couldn't go—no, I could not. . . . Do you know, I've never heard music like that before—no, nor never dreamed of none like it. Is it a piano?

'Yes. . . . You have never heard one?'

'No. . . . There's none on the Forecliff. And I've never been much in the way of goin' to the town. . . . I've heard the band, though—them that has two fiddles and the harp at Danesborough. That is beautiful—but not—not like this. . . . How did you ever learn to play so splendid?'

'I do not play well—not *very* well. I have a friend—Miss Douglas—who can play much better.'

'Oh; is that so? Because I heard him say—Mr. Aldenmede, I mean—I heard him say one day to the Canon—it was when he was paintin' on the Scaur—I heard him say as he'd

never heard no playin’ like yours—no, none to come near it for—for *expression*—that was what he said. I remember, because I wondered so much what he meant. And the Canon looked pleased, and said he thought so too.’

Thorhilda knew only too well that the crimson glow on her face was going on deepening and deepening, that the agitation of her heart and mind was visible on every feature of her face, in every muscle of her figure.

‘Have you seen Mr. Aldenmede lately?’ she said, trying with all her effort to seem calm and self-possessed.

‘Yes ; I saw him last night, and on Monday night. I see him four nights of every week. Isn’t that kind of him, and good ? And, oh ! how could I ever tell you of all he does and says by way of teaching me, and helping me ? You couldn’t think of the way he has of reminding me when I don’t sound the h’s. But that’s nothing, he says, to dropping the g’s ; that hurts his ear ever so much worse, and I’d never known that there was any g’s, not to notice them in speaking. But

every now and then I forget. Yet all these are little things, not to be named by the side of the greater ones. . . . Oh, how can I ever be grateful enough to one that's done so much for me ?'

There was a moment's silence—a painful silence on the one side. At last Miss Theyn spoke, evidently with effort.

'You speak of what Mr. Aldenmede *has done*. Does that mean that his kindness to you is at an end ? . . . Is he leaving Ulvstan Bight ?'

'Not just yet—at least, I hope not. But he has seemed very uncertain of late, as if he didn't know what he was going to do. . . . And in other ways—I don't know whether you have noticed it—in other ways he seems changed. Don't you think so, Miss Theyn?'

Thorhilda sat looking into the fire, smoothing out the hem of her cambric handkerchief, seeming now as cold and calm as before she had seemed agitated.

'I have not seen Mr. Aldenmede, not for some time past,' she said at length, speaking with an almost exaggerated quietness.

She could not say more to Barbara Burdas; she could not say to her, ‘I have not seen him since my engagement. Day by day I have expected to see him, to have to listen to his congratulations, but day by day he has spared me; and now, *now* I know what such sparing means!’

Thorhilda could say nothing of all this, nor did she quite recognise that she was speaking to one whose eyes had been opened by sorrow, by pain—the pain of loving and losing. Barbara was as silent, as thoughtful as Miss Theyn herself for awhile.

‘I thought you had been seeing him often,’ she said at last. ‘Perhaps it was that I *hoped* you had. I think that must have been it; that I hoped you’d seen him—seen how much he’d changed of late. I never knew no one turn so desperately sad all of a sudden. It’s ever so long now since he touched his picture; he seems to have no heart for paintin’—*there*! painting, I meant to say.’

‘Do you always think of Mr. Aldenmede when you speak?’ Miss Theyn asked, with a wan, faint smile breaking about her mouth.

‘Yes . . . how can I help it, when nearly every word has been caught up by him and set right? . . . There’s a few words yet that’s fearfully difficult. I think I’ll never know how to use them properly.’

The conversation seemed trifling enough, but within the heart of each speaker some painful emotion was being crushed and hidden. Thorhilda knew more of Barbara’s suffering than Barbara dreamed of hers ; and now Miss Theyn’s sympathy was more open to detect the depth of emotion and pain, her thought more drawn to dwell upon it. Already she was beginning to learn the lessons that sorrow alone can teach.

There had been another long pause, during which Miss Theyn’s thought had travelled rapidly, as thought always does travel when it is charged by the finer emotions.

‘And now tell me of yourself, Barbara,’ she said, speaking gently, and bending forward in the soft firelight till she seemed quite close to the pale, tired girl beside her. ‘Tell me of yourself. *You* have told me nothing, and Hartas has told me nothing. He said he had nothing to tell—nothing but disappoint-

ment and pain. . . . Can you not tell me how it is?'

Barbara was silent for awhile; then she lifted her wide blue eyes—eyes full of an inexpressible astonishment, an unspeakable sorrow. Did Miss Theyn *yet* understand no more than this?

In her perturbation, Barbara rose to her feet, feeling as if she must be away from this close and narrow atmosphere of misunderstanding. She could not go over all the old ground again now with Miss Theyn. Miss Theyn should not have required it—so it seemed.

'I told your brother how it was,' she said, with dignity. '*He* understands, if anyone does. I am beginning to think no one can—that no one ever does enter into a life not their own; no, not even to a life lived closest to theirs. But I must go home now, it's late enough. . . .'

'Stay a moment,' Miss Theyn interrupted, leaving the room as she spoke.

Presently she came back with some food on a small tray, which she carried herself, and she insisted that Barbara should eat of it.

Then, to Bab's distress, she heard the sound of carriage-wheels ; and Miss Theyn went with her to the door ; and the Canon was there ; and he was glad—truly glad that his niece should have been so thoughtful.

But while Barbara was being driven rapidly down to the Forecliff, Thorhilda Theyn was thinking more rapidly, more seriously than she had ever thought in her life before.

‘ Was it true, all that Barbara had said, or rather intimated ; could it be really true that another—one who had occupied so much of her thought—was really caring, really sorrowing *for her*, for her loss ! Alas, that it did not seem impossible ! Alas, that she should be drawn to dwell again and again upon the sweetness of another's sorrow !

CHAPTER XLIV.

‘SO FAREWELL THOU WHOM I HAVE KNOWN TOO
LATE.’

‘If thus to look behind is all in vain,
And all in vain to look to left or right,
Why face we not our future once again,
Launching with hardier hearts across the main,
Straining dim eyes to catch the invisible sight,
And strong to bear ourselves in patient pain?’

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

It was not much more than a week after Barbara's visit to the Rectory. The afternoon was cold and gray and wintry. The Canon had gone to the Bight, saying that he had some forty sick people on his list, and would therefore probably not return till late. Mrs. Godfrey, having a headache, had gone to lie down, and her niece, being all alone, tried various ways of passing the afternoon endurably. She found, however, that she was in no mood for practising, none for writing

letters, though there were many that she ought to have written. Within the past three days nearly twenty more wedding presents had arrived—to Mrs. Godfrey's distress no fewer than eight carriage-clocks among them. In a humorous mood the Canon had wound them all, set them agoing, placed them in a row on the top of a cabinet in the drawing-room, where they stood chiming—one sweeter and more silvery in tone than another ; yet Thorhilda could not bear to hear them, nor did the idea of stopping them commend itself to her taste. She remembered that one of them had been sent by Lady Diana Haddingley—her aunt's friend rather than her own—and with the clock had come a long and kindly letter. At the end there was a postscript, meant mainly for Mrs. Godfrey.

Thorhilda had seated herself by the writing-table in the drawing-room ; her intentions were of the best. One after another the clocks had chimed the hour of three. There was time enough to write a dozen letters before the post went out at five ; but, unfortunately, the topmost letter was Lady Di Haddingley's, and the postscript arrested all Miss Theyn's attention.

‘I hear that an old acquaintance of ours—Damian Aldenmede—is somewhere in your neighbourhood,’ Lady Di had written. ‘A friend—you will remember her—Lady Sarah Channing, declares that he has fallen in love with a fishwife, the mother of four or five children. The Channings have been staying for nearly a week at Danesborough, and Sarah wrote to ask me for your address. . . . Do, if you know anything of Mr. Aldenmede, tell me about him. He was a man I always had the highest admiration for, though I never felt that I understood him, though, perhaps, that was not his fault altogether. It is only like that can understand like, and there is no likeness between him and me. Perhaps I needn’t point that out if you have met him. What a fancy it is on his part to take to painting in that vigorous way! But then he never did things by halves. Sarah says the intimacy between him and the fishwoman began by his painting her, so I suppose she must be pretty. All the same, I hope there’s no truth in the rumour. Sarah was always a terrible gossip. Still there is no saying what a man like that will do who has gone through such seas of

trouble. And I can easily imagine, now that his first youth has passed, that it is very probable that he may be caught by genuine sympathy, whoever may offer it to him. All the same, I shall be glad to know that I have been misinformed.'

Mrs. Godfrey had read this aloud at breakfast-time, when the letters came in. Thorhilda had listened with burning cheeks, not daring to raise her eyes to her uncle's face. How much he saw, how far he understood, who shall say? Perhaps he could hardly have said all himself. It may be that his thought went the deeper, that his prayer became the more earnest. It is certain that the trifling episode did not pass over him lightly.

Now that Thorhilda was alone, that she might read this gossiping postscript in silence, it seemed to have a thousand meanings for her, and some of them were meanings that she did not dare to look into—not closely, not truly. She could not answer Lady Di's letter now; and presently she became aware of the fact that she could answer no other letter. Leaving the room in a very tumult of perturbation, she took the garden-hat that always hung in the

hall and went out of doors. It was cooler there, and freer, and fresher. She seemed able to think more truly, more clearly, out there among the leafless trees, that hung sadly and swayed softly, and lent an intensity of impressiveness to the always impressive scene.

For some time Miss Theyn walked there, now quiet and hopeful, now roused and excited, then suddenly depressed. She had almost forgotten the peacefulness that had been hers—not so long ago. For some time she had walked up and down the garden paths, passing from one mood to another ; then at last the big iron gates at the bottom of the avenue swung open ; she could hear the sharp metallic click of them, and instinctively she recoiled. Percival Meredith had been at the Rectory more than half of the day before. Had he the deficient taste, the imperfect tact, to come again to-day ? Miss Theyn knew of no other visitor to be expected.

Her surprise was at least as great as her emotion was deep when she discovered Mr. Aldenmede coming up the avenue, slowly, and

with the gait and movement of a man to whom all things were indifferent.

When he saw Miss Theyn he came forward more quickly, raising his hat with an almost eager courtesy. In his worst moments instinct stood for something.

Yet the meeting was not an easy one—how should it be? Yet neither of them dreamed how difficult the parting was to prove.

It was evident to Thorhilda from the first that Damian Aldenmede was not in an ordinary mood. His face was paler, thinner than usual; his gray eyes seemed more deeply set; the lines about his mouth were sterner, colder.

‘Is Canon Godfrey at home?’ he asked, without much appearance of interest in the answer. ‘I will not disturb him for long. I have merely called to say “good-bye.”’

Thorhilda understood all, the coldness, the depth of intensity behind this stiffness and rigidity of manner.

‘I am sorry,’ she replied, using all effort to seem calm, and succeeding beyond her own hope. ‘I am sorry, but my uncle is not at home. He will regret much when he

knows that he has missed you. . . . Do you leave Ulvstan soon ?

‘ I go to-morrow.’

‘ So early !’ Thorhilda exclaimed, still endeavouring to keep her voice free from tremor, her manner from all agitation. ‘ Is it sudden — your determination — or have you been thinking of it for some time ?’

‘ I decided last evening.’

‘ Oh ! . . . Will you come into the drawing-room ? My aunt is not quite well, but if I tell her that it is a farewell visit, I am sure she will wish to see you.’

‘ Thank you ; I would not disturb her on any account. Please give her my kind regards, and tell her of my regret. I should have been glad to see her.’

These stiff civilities should have ended the interview ; but somehow they did not. Thorhilda did not turn away ; Damian did not offer his hand. For a strange moment or two they stood there by the top of the avenue, not looking at each other, not speaking ; hardly breathing.

Thorhilda broke the silence, saying in tones that betrayed the effort she used :

‘ Perhaps your absence may not be for long.
. . . You are not leaving England ?’

‘ I leave England for Italy to-morrow night.
. . . When I return, or indeed whether or
no I return at all, must remain with the
future.’

Again for awhile there was silence ; a silence that would have been the end of the meeting if Damian had not raised his eyes to the beautiful face before him, discerning there much of the hidden pain, the hidden suffering. And as he looked he remembered the words that Barbara Burdas had said to him only the evening before, betraying much more than she knew that she betrayed.

‘ She’s none happy,’ Bab had said, ‘ not happy as she ought to be. Her eyes are full of dread and fear, as if she didn’t dare look into the future. And all about her mouth there’s the strangest trembling at times, just as if she’d be glad to lay down all her life, all her hope, at somebody’s feet, and die there.
. . . Oh, don’t talk to me about her no more ; she’s none happy !’

It was just as Barbara had said in her expressive way. This was just the look he saw

on the face of the woman he loved, and had lost.

No, he could not turn away; not yet, not thus. The past days and nights of suffering seemed to be pouring all their painful energy into the present moment. Strong man though he was, his heart was beating wildly, his brain throbbing fiercely. Was it over—was it possible that it could be over, all the new sweet promise that had seemed to be sent as a kind of aftermath; a blessing upon the later life of one whose earlier years had been all unblessed save for the benediction of sorrow? Was it not rather a dream, a delusion, all that he had heard of her engagement, her intended marriage? Had he indeed heard of these things from any authentic source at all? The very question seemed perplexing, almost stupefying.

It was the first word, the first question, that was difficult.

'Is it true—is it all quite true?' he said, speaking with such evident effort, taking a tone so different to any he had used to her before that she could not but understand.

She endeavoured to reply quietly; and

even in this painful moment the extreme graciousness of her manner, the unaffected truth of her soul, struck him afresh with fresh pain.

‘You are speaking of my engagement?’ she said, raising her grave, gray eyes with all their burden of sadness to his. There was no pretence, no subterfuge.

‘Yes,’ was the brief reply.

‘It is true.’

‘You are going to marry Mr. Meredith?’

‘Yes. . . . I have promised to do so.’

There was no mistaking her tone — the sadness of it, the weariness. He understood as well as if she had knelt at his feet and there poured out all the tale of her confession.

For awhile there was silence. Damian Aldenmede would not wrong himself, his own soul, by so much as one word of congratulation, or anything that could be taken for such. Thorhilda understood. She understood also that no small or mean jealousy was at the root of his silence, his reticence.

A man like that to be jealous of such a

one as Percival Meredith! The mere irony of her own soul as the idea crossed her brain showed her more than she had seen before. Never till now had the wide disparity between the two men been so apparent to her. The hour was full of disclosures.

'*And it is done!*' she said to herself, an *aura* passing over her like to that which passes over a human being when he is told that he must presently die from some secret ailment he had barely suspected. '*It is done: it cannot be undone.*'

And Damian Aldenmede also understood.

The pallid lips and cheeks, the pleading look about the wild, sad eyes, the new gentleness where all had been gentle before—all these things told him that she was conscious of mistake, of error.

Now he knew, as he had never dreamed to know, that he himself was not guiltless of her misery.

'I did it for the best—together for the best,' he said to himself as he stood there, staring intently into the depths of a white-edged holly-tree that stood upon the lawn, green, bright, glossy in its wintry beauty.

Sparrows were darting in and out, a bold blackbird peered from an upper bough, starlings were whirring all about, from the garden-beds to the unused chimneys.

‘I did it all for the best. . . . But I did wrong—a wrong I cannot undo. No; not by so much as a word, a look, may I now, or ever, attempt any undoing. It is with the smallest error as with the deepest sin—it may be repented of, it may be condoned, it may be forgiven—forgiven by God and by man—it cannot be undone. And it is no alleviation of my suffering to know that I do not suffer alone—nay, it is an aggravation rather. . . . What can I hope—that she will forget, that she will be happy?’

‘Happy! This woman happy with a man like Percival Meredith! Good heavens! What must her ignorance, her innocence be, since she can even have dreamt of it? And they, her guardians, her natural protectors—they must be as ignorant of evil as herself, of all that betrays evil, or they could never have done what I am persuaded they must have done—influenced her toward this marriage.’

They were sauntering about now, from path to path, silently, or all but silently. The remark as to the beauty of this evergreen, the failure of that, was not conversation ; something had to be said by way of escape from the awkwardness of perfect silence.

More than once a time of perfect silence came. They were passing quite close by the drawing-room windows at one such moment. Two of the windows were open wide ; a sudden simultaneous sound of chiming came with a silvery, musical burst. At the first moment Damian started, fancying he heard some distant peal of bells ; but when peal followed peal, he turned to Thorhilda with a question on his every feature. To his surprise, she was not only blushing with a deep scarlet blush, but her eyes were suffused with tears that insisted upon falling. She could not hide them ; she could not explain them.

'I must say good-bye,' she said, sobbing painfully, and holding out a tremulous hand. 'Do not come in ! I will tell Aunt Milicent—I will say all you could wish. . . . Good-bye—and—and my best wishes.'

She was still weeping, weeping bitterly, unrestrainedly ; and when Mr. Aldenmede took her hand in his, and held it warmly, she let it rest there for a moment or two. Nature had her way for that brief while.

It seemed very brief to Damian Aldenmede. All at once some secret spring of strength gave Miss Theyn power to recover herself for the moment. Recollection, sudden shame—but a foretaste of that shame that was to overpower her afterward—these and other things became momentarily helpful.

‘ Say good-bye,’ she urged. ‘ If you cannot congratulate me, you can at least wish me well—you can at least hope for me that when we meet again I shall be—be somewhat stronger ; that I shall disgrace the dignity of my womanhood less than I have done to-day.’

Mr. Aldenmede replied after a pause.

‘ I know what you are anticipating,’ he said kindly ; ‘ you can see already the hours of anguish, of self-reproach, that will follow this brief moment of weakness. I, too, know something of such hours. Every thinking human being has to know them,

to suffer from them. It is only the utterly callous who pass through life able to put aside every pang that comes from the consciousness of error, of mistake. . . . But, believe me, all this will pass—it may be late—I fear it will—yet eventually it will pass, and leave you wondering—not that you were moved so deeply, but that you should have been moved at all!’

‘Is that how the future seems to you?’

‘It is how I should wish it to appear in your sight.’

Thorbilda bowed her head meekly, sadly, heavily. Life seemed over—all save endurance of living.

It was then, in that moment, that there flashed across her mind the thought of one who, thousands of years before, had sold his birthright; and a few seconds later the words of the truest of our Christian poets passed across her thought :

‘We barter life for pottage, sell true bliss
For wealth or power, for pleasure or renown ;
Thus, Esau-like, our Father’s blessing miss,
Then wash with fruitless tears our faded crown.

Could it be possible that she had done

this—bartered her life, her soul, at four-and-twenty years of age? And for what? ‘Good God! for *what?*’ she asked in all reverence, as she stood there.

‘If I had the strength of soul, the daring of spirit, I would at this moment tell all to Damian Aldenmede,’ she continued in the depth of her thought. ‘But I have not—how should I have, with the attention of a very world of people fixed upon my marriage—my marriage to Percival Meredith, and that within a month? How could I dare to speak out all that is in me?’

Thought passes swiftly. Only a few seconds had passed since Damian spoke his last kindly word. He was still standing before her, pale, quiet, self-repressed.

‘I suppose we *must* part,’ he said at last, looking into her eyes once more.

‘But we shall meet again,’ Thorhilda said, trying to smile, but failing rather miserably. There was something in her face, her expression, that Damian Aldenmede could not bear to see just then.

‘We may meet again, we may not; at any rate, we must part *now*,’ he said, raising his

hat and turning away. ‘God bless you!’ was the last word that Miss Theyn heard from beyond the white-edged holly-tree. Farther off it was repeated more fervently: ‘May God bless you!’

* * * * *

The marriage-day was fixed; it was to be on Tuesday, January 11th.

That Christmas was naturally a busy time. ‘Busy, and oh, so happy up at the Rectory!’ Miss Douglas declared to friends who were not so fortunate as to be able to come and go at the Rectory when they chose. Miss Douglas was quite able to appreciate her privileges, and all appertaining to them. Moreover, whatever her lips might say, her eyes were not blinded.

Yes; certainly it was a busy time. Postmen and railway porters thronged the way at times; so many letters came, so many parcels, that more tables had to be brought down from the upper rooms to hold the still accumulating presents.

Thorhilda did not dare to say that each one was an added pang; how could she, when almost every day Mrs. Meredith came with

her son, each of them kissing the blushing, shrinking bride-elect on either cheek, each of them glad for the many tokens that betrayed such a deep and widespread regard?

Only one eye saw the true cause of the shrinking; only one heart understood the meaning of the hot, painful blush. Only one man, comprehending all, feared, and suffered, and prayed in silence.

And his prayer was answered; but not as he had dreamt and thought it might be.

In this very answer there was to be such a sting, such an agony, as Canon Godfrey had never in his life known.

CHAPTER XLV.

‘UNSEEN FINGERS ON THE WALL.

‘With aching hands and bleeding feet
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone,
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day, and wish ’twere done.
Not till the hours of light return,
All we have built do we discern.’

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

THOUGH the times were bad, ‘very bad indeed,’ the fisher-folk of Ulvstan Bight said, yet some curious and not infrequent alleviations came in their way about Christmas-time. It was only natural that the Canon should interest himself largely in the matters of soup and Christmas beef, of blankets and coals; it was only to be expected that Mrs. Godfrey and her niece should drive down to the Fore-cliff almost every day with flannel petticoats, with knitted stockings—there were at least some half-dozen old women in the neighbour-

hood who were kept in full work from January to December of each year executing Mrs. Godfrey's orders for stockings and socks. And then, too, there were the little frocks, made of such ill-smelling brown winsey that the carriage window had to be kept open.

'An hour in the sea-breeze of the Bight will blow all that away,' Mrs. Godfrey said, noticing her niece's absolute faintness and pallor; and then, by way of diversion, drawing her attention to the seemliness of the little garments, which had most of them been made by a clever, tiny woman, whom nobody ever called a 'dwarf' because of her perfect proportion.

Miss Birkin had done her best for the children this cold Christmas-time. The little frocks were bright with scarlet braid and blue; the little jackets were warm with red flannel linings; the caps, the comforters, the muffatees, the mittens, the gloves, ah, how bright they all looked! and what pleasure they gave!

The Canon's wife and his niece, driving back to Yarburgh Rectory, the carriage half-filled with empty baskets and bags, should hardly have been silent or depressed.

There was no mystery about all this. But when some large packing-cases began to arrive at Ulvstan, for the most part addressed on the outside to Mr. David Andoe, and found to contain many smaller packages otherwise addressed within; a sense of wonder was developed very rapidly; this largely because, so far, there was no clue to the sender.

Ann Stamper, the landlady of the inn, a poor, ailing, worn-out old woman, who had a little packing-case of comforts especially directed to her, declared that nobody could have sent it save Lord Hermeston, of Hermeston Peel, who had taken shelter in her house one showery day, and had been so affable, so simple, as to win all the old woman's warmest regard for him. But Ann Stamper was not the only one to whom the anonymous presents gave cause for mistake.

Old Hagar Furniss found a waterproof basket at her door one morning, containing tea, and biscuits, and tinned meats of various kinds, with a big round plum-cake of such quality that Hagar declared, with tears in her eyes, that no bride-cake could ever have surpassed it. But this was not all : warm scarlet

flannel was there in sufficient quantity to last the old woman her lifetime, with a large eider-down counterpane, a thick rug for her fireside, some soft, warm brown woollen serge for a gown, and finally such a big plaided woollen shawl that the poor old creature declared she could never know what it was to be cold any more.

‘Don’t tell me,’ the old fishwife said, her head trembling more than usual in the depth of this new emotion. ‘Don’t tell me. It’s *him*—it’s the Rector. Don’t say it isn’t—for there’s nobody else, nobody living, as ’ud know so exactly what an old woman like me ’ud want an’ crave for, an’ sit an’ dream of when the fire’s dying out of a night, an’ ya daren’t put a bit more coal on to keep ya fra starvin’ for the dread o’ the next night seeing ye without an ounce o’ coal i’ the house! . . . No, don’t tell me; ’twas him, an’ nobody else. An’ may the good God reward him, for I can’t; no, I can’t so much as say what it all means to me, leave alone thankin’ him. . . . Mebbe God ’ll thank him some day. There’s something like that i’ St. Mattha’. It’s the Last Daäy, the Judgment Daäy, an’ the King

says: "Acause ya did unto them," meanin' the poor, such as me, "Ah reckon Ah'll take it as if ya'd done it unto Me Mysel."'

Here and there, all over the Bight, there were these pleasant touches of mystery; and yet, helpful as they were, they could not altogether put a stop to the growing hardness of things—the increasing anxiety. Even in such homes as that of old Ephraim Burdas, that Christmas was a time of dread, of strain, of hand-to-hand fight with each sixpence that had to be sent out for food or 'fire eldin.'

As a matter of course, Barbara had not been forgotten. Miss Theyn herself had come down one day with a closely-packed bag, which had seemed to the children standing round as if it were never going to be emptied. Toys were there; chocolates (less tempting, because less known), sweets, paper bags full of toffee—made in the Rectory kitchen; and then below came the warm, comfortable little articles of dress. But this was not all. Outside a hamper had been left, which Woodward had been told to unfasten, and then to leave it standing under the little porch. Bab saw

it there when she went to the door with Miss Theyn.

She had not seen it at the first moment. Ailsie had called her elder sister back entreatingly, only to whisper, in a curiously agitated way for so mere a child:

‘Ask her to come again, Barbie, will you? *Do* ask her to come again! . . . It’s not the goodies. . . . Ah can’t eat ’em; Stevie can—an’ Zeb, an’ Jack—but Ah noän care for ’em. But *will* you ask her to come again? . . . She smiles so—doesn’t she, Barbie? . . . An’ she looks at ya so! An’ her bonny white hands, and the way she has o’ touching things, oh, Ah do like to see her! Ask her to come again, Barbie!’

But whilst Barbara was putting the child’s request into words, her eye fell upon the hamper, as Miss Theyn saw, enabling her to speak of it in a careless, incidental way.

‘That is something from the Rectory,’ she said. ‘I believe it is my aunt’s present to your grandfather.’

But Thorhilda perceived the momentary flush of pain that passed over the girl’s face. Barbara had always been so equal to the house-

hold needs, that she could not bear that the truth should be suspected now; nor was it,—no, nor anything near the truth.

If anyone had approximate dreams, it must have been the sender of the mysterious parcel that Bab found on the doorstep one morning in Christmas-week—not that it was mysterious to her; and all at once she saw to the bottom of the other mysteries that were happening all about.

Yet, if he chose to do good by stealth, he should not be put to the blush of finding it fame by any word of hers. Doubtless Mr. Aldenmede had sufficient reasons for wishing to seem a comparatively poor man; but no man so poor as he chose to appear to be could afford to scatter gifts over a whole village in this prodigal way.

‘No; I’ll not speak of it—not even to *her*,’ Barbara said, with tears in her eyes, as she stood contemplating the dozen new and tempting books that had been packed so carefully at the bottom of the case, and the pile of bright scarlet merino, evidently meant for Ailsie.

How well she remembered his saying that

he always felt grateful to any child who came tripping across his out-door vision in a scarlet frock or a scarlet cloak! Ailsie should have both before he came again.

Then thought itself seemed to pause. Would Mr. Aldenmede ever come to Ulvstan Bight any more? With a sigh, Bab admitted to herself that it seemed impossible he should.

He had not been happy for a long time before he went away—not even as happy, as equable as when he first came—and he had seemed a man of sufficiently saddened soul then. And Barbara knew all about the cause of his more recent unhappiness—how could she help but know?

And each time she saw Miss Theyn she saw more certainly than before that happiness was not *there*—not the happiness that should have been at such a time as this.

Barbara saw no future; how should she?

‘I suppose they were engaged before—Mr. Meredith and her. And then Mr. Aldenmede came, and she saw the difference—ay, me! how could she help? Why, yon man at Ormston minds me of a peacock most of all;

he shines so, and he struts so, with his beautiful white shirtfront standing out in a bow before him—and him turning round in that slow, stiff way, as if he’d got to move altogether or not at all; eh me, how *could* one like her ever demean herself to one like him? an’ his hair turning gray; and a big bald patch on the top of his crown already! Eh, how could she?’

But Barbara was just, and had to remember that Damian Aldenmede’s hair had at least a grayer look than Mr. Meredith’s had.

‘He looks as old, Mr. Aldenmede does, mebbe older—but it’s none the same sort of aging, not at all. Why, when he laughs, he laughs like a boy—an’ the other smiles as if he were ashamed o’ demeaning himself so far.’

Was it strange that just now Barbara Burdas should be drawn to dwell upon Miss Theyn so much? Does it not often happen, all unknowingly, all unconsciously, that our thoughts, our very dreams, are drawn to those (near to us either by sympathy, or by relationship) who are passing through crises of which we are altogether unaware, or have but the merest suspicion?

This fisher-girl of the Forecliff could really know nothing of the strife that was deepening day by day in the soul of Thorhilda Theyn.

‘Yet I cannot forget her; no, not for an hour! It is strange how I am always finding myself thinking of her! I wonder has she got any thought of me?’

Inevitably Miss Theyn had thought of Barbara Burdas, ‘many a time and oft.’ How should it not be so?

‘She loves Hartas—I know she does. I believe his love is precious to her; yet she will not marry him, lest she should even *seem* to be self-seeking—lest she should even seem to desire to raise herself to a different social level; to desire to find ease, and rest, and comfort, and what would perhaps even appear to her as luxury! Barbara Burdas, fisher-girl as she is, will not even have it thought that she could sell her soul for a mess of pottage. And I . . . I . . .? Good God! what have I done?’

There was no irreverence in Miss Theyn’s cry. She covered her face with her hands, and knelt by her bed in all the agony of

knowledge of error and mistake—irrevocable mistake.

Every swiftly-passing day and hour increased the irrevocableness. Once there had been a chance. Until others knew, and added the pressure of their knowledge, their congratulations, there had surely been a way of escape. Now there was none ; and day by day the yearning grew—the longing to escape by any means. With each fresh wedding present, each new congratulation, each allusion to the coming event, she felt afresh the weight, the dread, it might almost be said the repulsion.

It could not be that things should be thus with his niece and Canon Godfrey have no knowledge. It seemed to him now that he had had suspicion from the first.

He could not ask her of her own feeling. It is strange how sometimes the fact of a deep affection, with all the sympathy, all the nearness that such affection means, will yet act as a barrier between sensitive souls. There are things that it is easier to say to a comparative stranger than to a mother revered and beloved.

Canon Godfrey's eyes once fairly opened, he began to see much that he had been blind to before; and for a brief time he withdrew himself, and lived as much apart from his household as was possible to him. He had a great determination to make.

At last, one Wednesday afternoon—it was the Wednesday in the week before the marriage, which was to take place on the Tuesday following—he asked his niece to go with him for a drive. It was a mild day for January. A gray mist was on all the land, rolling over the brown barren fields, over the leafless hedges, over the sparsely-scattered trees.

‘Where would you like to go?’ the Canon said, taking his seat beside her in the open carriage.

‘Oh, to the Grange!’ Thorhilda replied. ‘Aunt Averil isn’t well, and Rhoda has a cold. We must go and see after them.’

This was not what the Canon had wished, but he yielded; and his yielding was a little fatal from his own point of view. He had no chance of driving along the moorland road above Ormston Magna, of looking down

upon the house, the gardens, the wide lawns, the small but beautiful park, of leading the conversation from these to their owner, and from their owner to the future—his and hers. If the Canon had but known how his niece was desiring it! How she was yearning for help, for strength, for light! That was the worst—all seemed so dark now, so hopeless.

The visit to the Grange was pleasanter than usual. Miss Averil Chalgrove was in her own room, and Thorhilda went up to see her. It was the one pretty room in the house—the only one where there was any true feminine daintiness; and Thorhilda was glad to see even that.

'I wonder Rhoda is not influenced by your pretty room, Aunt Averil,' she said, glancing at the elegantly-decorated toilet-table, the silver-mounted pots and bottles, the ivory-backed brushes, the mother-o'-pearl glove-boxes, etc., etc.

It was not easy to see them all, the light being so exceedingly dim. Sunny as the afternoon was, the rose-red blinds were half-drawn; the lace curtains closed utterly. It was a most becoming light, however, as Miss

Chalgrove knew. She was lying upon a sofa, with a pale-blue dressing-gown, elaborately trimmed with lace and ribbon, robing her from head to foot. A tiny table, with an exquisite little set of cups and saucers, was by her side; and a vase with the loveliest white and yellow roses in it. Roses! yes, and even orange-blossom, as Miss Theyn perceived to her agitation.

‘The room is moderately pretty,’ Miss Chalgrove admitted with a sigh; ‘but you know how it comes to be so. Half my small possessions, nay, far more than half, are birthday or Christmas presents from the Haddingleys. They never forget me. I hear they have not forgotten you. What have they sent you, Thorhilda?’

‘Don’t speak of wedding presents, Aunt Averil, *don’t*; I can’t bear it!’ the girl exclaimed passionately. ‘I came here this afternoon to be free from it all for a while. . . . Please talk of something else—*anything*. What is Hartas doing?’

Miss Chalgrove was so overcome by her niece’s most unusual and most unexpected vehemence that she had to use both vinaigrette

and fan before she could recover strength enough to reply.

'You were always a strange girl,' she said at last in faint tones. 'I often think that you have had just a little too much prosperity, that life has come to you just a little too easily. . . . Ah me! if—if only some others might taste of such happiness as yours!'

Thorhilda was silent for a moment. Miss Chalgrove could not see in that dim rose-coloured light how pale, how rigid her niece had grown. But presently she felt her hand grasped warmly in a younger and stronger one, yet the grasp was tremulous.

'Don't speak to me of happiness just now, Aunt Averil; do not speak to me of myself at all. Tell me how things are going on here. Uncle Hugh fancied there was improvement.'

'Improvement, my dear! If you said revolution you would almost be within the mark. Why, only to-day your father and Hartas have gone to Danesborough, to a sale of cattle and farming things. They have gone together, and for business purposes. Do you know all that that means? I suppose you do not,'

Miss Chalgrove concluded, with tears in her eyes.

‘And things are really going better?’

‘They are promising to go better; that is everything. Hartas is just one of those people who can do nothing by halves; yet I never thought he had in him such a power of work, and of ability to organize work, as he has displayed of late. Of course, I only hear of it all through your father and Rhoda; but they seem as if they could not make enough of him now. . . . It is very strange! Think of a crisis in a man’s life making such a change!’

‘But remember what a crisis it was!’

‘I dare not remember; I cannot, even yet. . . . Why, for nights and nights afterward I awoke screaming, and Rhoda had to come and sit beside me for hours together. Once your father came; and immediately, as soon as he saw me, he sent Burdon off for Dr. Douglas. And all *that* came of my suffering because of his suffering—Hartas’s. I had dwelt upon it so, imagined it all so vividly in my own brain, that I never slept without being instantly introduced to scenes of sea-suffering.

It was terrible, oh! it was very terrible; but the curious part of it is that ever since that time Hartas has been so much more to me than he was before. I am not myself to-day, because he is not here. I like to know that he is not far away from the Grange; I like him to come to my room and sit for an hour or two at a time; and you would not wonder if you saw him here by my fireside in the twilight. There is such a change! It is not only that he looks paler, thinner, more refined, that he has gentler ways, quieter manners; there is something beyond all that.'

Thorhilda mused for awhile, then she said:

'Don't you think that "something" may be love, Aunt Averil?'

Miss Chalgrove knew what Thorhilda was meaning; but she did not reply in her usual light and crude manner. Even to Miss Chalgrove there was a change in the atmosphere—a change for the better; how much for the better who shall say?

'A little leaven leaveneth the whole.'

'I know of what, or rather of whom you are thinking,' Miss Chalgrove said at last,

evidently speaking with some difficulty, and then pausing for a considerable time.

At last, roused by the subject, she spoke with some vehemence.

‘It pained me terribly at first,’ Miss Chalgrove said. ‘How should it not pain me, to think of my nephew, my only nephew, marrying a fisher-girl, a bait-gatherer! The mere idea was repulsive in the extreme.’

‘Have you ever seen Barbara Burdas?’

‘No; nor do I wish to see her. . . . I am told you have quite taken what people call a “fancy” to her.’

‘That is hardly correct. I have been slow, extremely slow, to perceive that she is one of the best, one of the purest, one of the most high-minded women it has ever been my privilege to meet.’

‘Really! . . . And very pretty, I suppose?’

‘Not pretty at all; at any rate not now. Six months ago she had a sort of pink-and-cream freshness, and certainly her bright blue eyes were very attractive. All that has gone. She is thinner, and she looks faded; and the light has gone from her eyes, except just when some emotion brings it back for a moment. . . .

No ; of mere prettiness Barbara has little left, I am sorry enough to say it.’

‘ But all the while you are meaning that she has some stronger and deeper attraction ?’

‘ Yes ; that is just what I am thinking, but I cannot explain it. . . . Anyhow, I do not now wonder that one like Hartas should have been drawn to her. . . . I have only seen it lately, but she is his superior in every way !’

‘ In *every* way ? But that is exaggeration surely ! Think of it, Thorda dear !’

‘ I have thought of it often. The girl has naturally the “ air ” of her class. For all her fine independence of spirit, she is yet wanting in self-sufficiency, especially when anyone is present that she cares for ; but of this, of all this, one thinks nothing in her presence. She stands there, dignified with a certain moral dignity—my uncle Hugh would say spiritual—and one is even conscious of a kind of inferiority, as if *she* were the superior. It is difficult to explain how, on the one hand, she seems wanting—just a little ; how, on the other, she surprises you with an almost overpowering sort of supremacy. You would

never dare to utter a silly joke if Barbara Burdas were within hearing.'

'I don't know that I am given to uttering "silly jokes" under any circumstances,' Miss Chalgrove said, evidently, with her usual amusing egotism, having taken part of Miss Theyn's remark in a personal way. 'Yet what you say interests me. I do not doubt but that it is partly her influence that has wrought such a change in Hartas. And what a change it is! He is not the same in any sense of the word. From being the most absolute idler on the face of the earth, he has become one of the most hard-working men I have ever known. And he must have some strong purpose in his brain to induce him to go on working thus. I cannot tell what it is. He has said that he has no hope of inducing the girl to change her mind. One cannot but be glad, very glad; yet the matter is not without interest.'

'No, it is not without interest,' Thorhilda replied, with a certain dreaminess of manner which altogether belied the emotion in her heart.

It seemed as if everywhere the strong, pure

influence of a pure love was having a good effect upon others—upon all whom it touched save herself. And what was it meaning to her? She asked the question with apparent sincerity. Yet she dared not look upon the answer.

‘I must make answer sometime,’ she said, as they went homeward, her uncle silent, absorbed by her side.

He, too, had seen much in the changes that were happening to make him thoughtful, yet far from unhopeful. Nay, it almost seemed as if his brightest outlook were here. The few moments that Thorhilda had passed upstairs with her valetudinarian aunt the Canon had spent with Rhoda; and he could not but discern the change that had passed over the household. It was visible in the aspect of the room, in Rhoda’s look and manner, and speech and appearance.

‘Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.’

Such were the words that struck Canon Godfrey as he went home to his comfortable-seeming Rectory at Yarburch; a home that

seemed to outsiders as if no cloud might ever overshadow it, no thorn come near any rose within its walls.

All the way the Canon was silent ; all the way his niece was wondering if she might make one more effort, one more attempt to confess her mistake, her misery, her dread. Then she remembered that it was Wednesday.

‘ Uncle Hugh will be thinking over his lecture for this evening,’ she said to herself. ‘ That is why he is so silent, so absorbed. I must not disturb him.’

CHAPTER XLVI.

SOME WORDS FROM A WEDNESDAY EVENING LECTURE.

‘For this I say is death, and the sole death,
When a man’s loss comes to him from his gain.’

ROBERT BROWNING.

It was not by any means a studied informality that marked the Wednesday evening services at St. Margaret’s, yet the Canon had, with some care, decided upon the lines he wished to occupy.

This pre-consideration notwithstanding, he found that experience considerably modified the rules he had laid down. To feel himself face to face with some dozen fishermen and their wives in the dim light of the nave of the old church on a winter’s evening was a moment sufficiently realistic to call forth new effort, new sensitiveness to the need of effort. In such hours as these Canon Godfrey felt

always that the uttermost was demanded of him—the very best that he was prepared to give.

And, conscientious as he was, often he knew that his preparation had not enabled him to meet the moment and its demand. Again and again he had to kneel at night, crying, ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’

So it is that the saints of God are trained to their saintliness by the sense of failure, of inadequacy. It is not the man who makes the fair and truthful statement :

‘Lo these many years do I serve Thee, neither transgressed I at any time Thy commandments.’

It is not this man whose career is held out for the encouragement of erring humanity. It is his younger brother, who could only cry, in the agony of conscious abasement :

‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before Thee ;

‘And am no more worthy to be called Thy son : make me as one of Thy hired servants!’

It is this younger son who draws our sympathy, who claims our compassion ; it is here that we feel a true like-mindedness. In

the worst moments we have known, has not this same Prodigal Son seemed also as a friend and a brother ?

On this particular winter's night—it was the fifth of January—Mr. Egerton had taken the service, the Canon remaining in the vestry till the end of it ; an altogether unprecedented proceeding on his part.

It was a dull, chill night ; and certainly not twenty people were scattered about in the gloom. The Canon came down the chancel steps slowly, looked about him calmly, sadly, then bowed his head in prayer for a moment or two upon the reading-desk, from whence he always gave his homely lecture. It was nearer to the people than the pulpit was ; and the position seemed to have less of formality about it.

The church was large for the place—large, and old, and gray, and notwithstanding restoration, somewhat dismal. Canon Godfrey tried always to refrain from seeing who might be present before him, and who absent. But to-night almost every face seemed to be impressed upon his vision in an instant.

Each old fisherman he knew, each old or

young fishwife—there might be ten of them altogether. Amongst them was the uplifted, appealing face of Barbara Burdas. And a little nearer to him—only a little, he had caught sight of the face of his niece, Thorhilda.

He had not been sure as to her presence beforehand ; he had hoped for it ; he had let drop a word as to his hope. And she was here.

All alone she sat in a dim corner where the lamp-light did not fall. The old brown oak cast shadows about her ; her dress was dark and unobtrusive ; only her face seemed white—white, and sad, and still.

While the Canon's head was bowed in prayer, hers was bent too in all reverence. She did not lift her face till the preparatory silence was broken.

The Canon's voice was lower than usual, sadder, more impressive.

‘As you know, my friends, it is not my usual way to take a text for these Wednesday-evening lectures ; rather have I preferred a *thought*, a quotation from some poet, an idea from some impressive writer. To-night I would go back to the old and time tried plan ;

I would give you a text of the Holy Scripture. This text you will find either in the pages of St. Matthew, chapter 16th, and verse 26th, or in St. Mark, chapter 8th, verse 37th. . . . There is but little difference :—*

“What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

‘If you turn to the New Version of the Gospels you will find that the word “soul” is translated “life,” so that the question appears much less impressive :

“What shall a man give in exchange for his life?”

‘For mere physical life men have been drawn to exchange many things—honour, money, faith itself. The life of the body is precious to the most miserable among us. It is a first instinct to fight for it, care for it, protect it ; and that this instinct was thus strongly implanted in us for wise ends who can doubt? There is even a sacredness—a most solemn sacredness—about the most pitiful human life.

* Of course no complete sermon is intended here—this is no place for it.

‘What, then, shall we say of the soul—the soul’s life—the life that is to know no ending? Thought itself seems silenced while we ask the question,

‘“*What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*”

‘I think it possible that some of us may have read this text wrongly; that we may have understood it as if it were written:

‘“What shall a man *take* in exchange for his soul?”

‘It is as if the enemy of souls might offer us a kind of bargain, as doubtless often he does; saying to this man, “Will you take fame?” to this, “Will you take riches?” to this, “Will you take the praise of men?”

‘To some of us the voice of the tempter may come in tones of far lowlier seeming—he knows precisely where to strike. So to the man weary of strife he will offer peace; to the woman worn by labour and care he will offer rest; to the brain tried sorely by responsibility he will offer the means of luxury and ease, the most perfect cessation from all strain, all fear as to the future. It is this complete know-

ledge that renders him so formidable as an adversary.

‘ Yet we are not defenceless. We are put on our guard from the first moment of capacity to distinguish between good and evil.

‘ The question is writ large and plain :

‘ “ What will you give in exchange for your soul ? ”

‘ What will you *give* ?

‘ It is a strange thought at first. Is a man’s soul not really his ? Must he buy it ? must he redeem it ? must he give something in exchange for it if it is to be really his own ?

‘ The answer is, *Yes !*

‘ You must work out your own salvation.

‘ Not the smallest thing worth having is to be had for nothing. Everything has its price, and the price is proportioned to the value. What, then, is the value you put upon your soul ; the part of you that is to live for ever ? It must live for ever. *How* it is to live here-after you must decide here ; this is the only time for decision. And if you fancy that you can defer the moment for deciding, believe me that is a mistake. While you are putting off

from day to day, the spiritual laws that rule your spiritual life are deciding for you. The longer you leave your soul's life to chance, the more difficult will you find it to take your rightful position again.

* * * * *

‘ Even now, to-night, you are asked—not by me, but by One speaking through me—even now you are asked this question :

“ *What will you GIVE in exchange for your soul ?*”

‘ You must give something—that is the nature of your tenure ; and seldom, if ever, is it left to any of us to choose *what* we will give. As a rule something is put before us ; something that we know instantly to be a *crux*—a trial of our faith,

‘ Daily we must give something ; hourly. “ Take up your cross *daily* and follow Me,” said the Master, speaking as none had ever spoken before, with a regal commandingness that drew all hearts capable of being drawn. It is so still.

“ “ I die daily,” St. Paul declares ; and in another place he said, “ For we who live are delivered always unto death for Jesus’ sake ;

that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

'Everywhere it is put before the Christian that the price he has to pay for his soul's life is a daily death—a death to something more than what the world counts sin.

'The words may seem harsh, the thought forbidding ; so they might be in reality but for two things : first, the love that constrains us, that is all about us, that is all within us, filling us with warmth, surrounding us with light. This love is the first and greatest thing that turns the true Christian's sorrow into joy.

'The second thought that should forbid the way of life from seeming a hard way is the certain and cruel hardness of the world's way. Oh, my friends, believe one who has known all too much of what the world has to offer ; believe him when he says to you that its best is a hollow and bitter mockery of what you dream, of what you seek !

"What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

'Ah, what is it that he accepts ? Unrest, wild, maddening unrest, where he had thought

peace would be ; disappointment where he had dreamed only of fruition, the fullest fruition, of his every hope ; pain where he had felt sure of finding joy ; sorrow instead of gladness ; loneliness on the heights where love was to have met him ; humiliation where praise and honour were to have been ; thanklessness in the place of gratitude ; coldness and unkindness where friendship had held out both hands in token of warmth, and sympathy, and loving-kindness.

‘ These are the things we accept in exchange for our soul. All too late we begin to find the truth.

“ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.

“ For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?”

‘ What shall it profit him ? Oh, that we should need to wait for our dying hour to see this—to be able to answer this !

‘ Every day the question is asked of us, but to each one of us there comes a special hour of questioning. Sometimes it is early in life, sometimes late ; sometimes God in His mercy

sends the questioner "Fate" more than once. "Fate," one will say; "Circumstance," another. It is the same thing, "the Providence, the forethought of God."

'It is God taking care for your soul, for mine.

"Be sure of this," says a Christian writer yet living, long distinguished for the purity and holiness of his living—"Be sure of this, that if He has any love for you, if He sees aught of good in your soul, *He* will afflict you, if you will not afflict yourselves. He will not let you escape. He has ten thousand ways of purging those whom He has chosen, from the dross and alloy with which the fine gold is defaced. He can bring diseases on you, or can visit you with misfortunes, or take away your friends, or oppress your minds with darkness, or refuse you strength to bear up against pain when it comes upon you. He can inflict on you a lingering and painful death. He can make 'the bitterness of death' pass not. We, indeed, cannot decide in the case of others, when trouble is a punishment, and when not; yet this we know, that all sin brings affliction. We have no means of judging others, but we may judge ourselves. Let us judge ourselves, that we be not judged. Let us afflict ourselves, that God may not afflict us."

"Let us afflict ourselves." That is usually the meaning of these times of temptation. We are brought into a strait, asked what we will give to be delivered from it, and given free choice between two answers, often enough, God knows, almost equally painful. Then

the result may safely be left to God Himself ; a God to Whom we have prayed, confessed, and before Whom we have laid all our straits and helplessness.

‘ But more frequently it happens that our Temptation in the Wilderness—the wilderness of this wide, cold, unfriendly world—more frequently it happens that our temptation resembles His. On the one hand there is the offer of bread, of relief from hunger, symbolising deliverance from temporal care. Many of us are acquainted with that form of temptation, and to many of us it is the strongest of all. From the man with a little money, who is told that with that little he may “grow money” if he will but speculate, or gamble with sufficient unscrupulousness, from him to the man who can write a pure book, and is told, over and over again, that if he will but put the same talent or genius into a book more or less *impure*, all the golden gates will be opened to him henceforth—from the one to the other there is no wide stretch. The temptation is the same.

“ You have the stones,” this wily tempter points out. “ And you have the power to com-

mand these stones to be made bread. Why not? It is a simple matter. The world that looks upon you now coldly, or shyly, or, at best, with hope that some day you may be worthy of its warm patronage, the same world would be at your feet if you did but issue the simple command to the stones before you that they should be made bread."

' The second temptation, to spiritual power, comes seldom to ordinary men *in these days*. The time for its predominance has not yet arrived ; it is in the distant future, the far future, that this temptation will assail men more frequently, more fiercely. We have not arrived at that time, nor shall we ; not any of us who are living now.

" I shall see it, but not now ; I shall behold it, but not nigh."

' The third temptation, to temporal power, is rife enough ; but it does not come so near, so strenuously, to most of us as the first. Yet the two are often combined ; then they are strong indeed. Who shall resist them ?

* * * * *

' Again the question comes, " What shall a man *give* in exchange for his soul ?"

‘ Most of us, at any rate many of us, would be ready to say at once :

“ Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.”

‘ But ah ! almost at the first step we stumble. The stones are hard, the darkness, the loneliness, the need of human sympathy and help make the way all too difficult, and we shrink back disheartened, dismayed, still farther even from being at peace with ourselves.

‘ If now, just now in this hour of discouragement, we are drawn up to some mountain-top of temptation, left alone there with the tempter, a tempter who offers us all the good things of this world, offering them in precisely the manner to suit our circumstances, our age, or inclination, how shall we escape ?

‘ How, indeed ? First of all there must be a strong and clear sense of what *yielding* will mean ; what it must mean here, what hereafter.

‘ And if there be any soul here to-night struggling alone on the barren mountain-top of temptation, struggling with the strange, dark form of evil which has been permitted to tempt mankind from the first created

human being unto, undoubtedly, the last ; if there be any such here to-night, let him think, let him pause, *now* and *here*. In the name of God, I ask any such tempted soul to lay down his soul's burden before Him who created that soul, and who knew of the burden, who pre-arranged it, *even before the world was*. Think of that ; that however keen, and bitter, and deep, and unbearable your trial may seem, your Creator foresaw and arranged it all down to the last detail.

‘ He knows what you will do. He knows whether you will stand or fall.

‘ It may be that you *have* fallen. If so, the price to be paid in exchange for your soul will be so much the greater.

‘ He knows whether you will pay it, or whether you will exchange your soul instead of paying it.

‘ Also He knows that He has put every inducement in your way. While *permitting* temptation, as a sole means of spiritual growth and strengthening, He has URGED the way of escape. The New Testament, as the Old, is charged with the appeal, “ *Why will ye die ?*”

‘ And yet we choose death. Thousands of us day by day are choosing death—smiling while we choose. And yet, behind the smile, what tears !

· Again I will quote from that writer whose words of spiritual helpfulness I used but now :

“It is said that we ought to enjoy this life as the gift of God. Easy circumstances are generally thought a special happiness ; it is thought a great point to get rid of annoyance or discomfort of mind and body ; it is thought allowable and suitable to make use of all means available for making life pleasant. We desire, and confess we desire, to make time pass agreeably, and to live in the sunshine. All things harsh and austere are carefully put aside. We shrink from the rude lap of earth, and the embrace of the elements, and we build ourselves houses in which the flesh may enjoy its lust, and the eye its pride. We aim at having all things at our will. Cold, and hunger, and hard lodging, and ill-usage, and humble offices, and mean appearance, are all considered serious evils. And thus year follows year, to-morrow as to-day, till we think that this, our artificial life, is our natural state, and must and ever will be. But, O ye sons and daughters of men, what if this fair weather but insure the storm afterwards ? What if it be that the nearer you attain to making yourselves as gods on earth now, the greater pain lies before you in time to come, or even (if it must be said) the more certain becomes your ruin when time is at an end ? Come down then from your high chambers at this season to avert what else may be.”



‘ There is yet time, yet, even yet, to answer

the question, "What will you give in exchange for your soul?"

'You may yet say, "I do not care to buy my soul. I will give nothing. I will buy my life. I will give one sort of happiness for another sort. I am doing this consciously. But as for my soul, that is a question that at least may be deferred. There is always hope for one's soul. The thief, dying on the cross, had hope that he might be saved."

'So he had. "This hope was given to one man that not one might despair; it was given *but to one*, that none might presume."

'But few of us, very, very few are so presumptuous as to reply thus: "No; we will give ourselves to God when this crisis is over, or that." Not next year, but this; not next month, but this; sometimes not even to-morrow, but to-night; this very night, when we kneel for our last prayer.

'Then why not now, this hour, this moment? Why not—oh! why not surrender at once?"

The Canon had spoken the latter words

tremulously, beseechingly ; with his last cadence his voice had broken pathetically. . . . It was evident that he could say but little more.

The last words he had said were yet lingering on the ear of each listener. The candles were flickering and dying by the tin sconces ; a chill wind was wailing outside, shivering up the wide gray aisles of the church.

Wilder and wilder the wind clamoured round the old gray tower ; dreary and yet more dreary it came wailing up the silent aisle.

Once more Canon Godfrey broke the silence, saying, in low, penetrating, fervid tones :

‘ Think of this. I beseech you, think of it—

“ *What will you give in exchange for your soul ?* ”

Another moment, the moment following this plea, there was silence.

Then a cry rang through the church—a sudden, thrilling, despairing, appalling cry—such as few of those who were listening then

had ever heard before. For a moment, a long moment, so it seemed to Canon Godfrey, no one stirred; no one dared to stir. The Canon himself could not. He bowed his head once again upon the desk, expecting to hear the cry repeated; but no repetition came; instead, he heard a low, intense, irrepressible sobbing.

Did those few uncultured people understand? One by one, they left the place. Mr. Egerton went to the dim corner, where a figure knelt in a very agony of mental pain, not even yet to be subdued by any mere effort of will.

Mr. Egerton did the best thing he could do. He knelt by the sobbing, suffering woman; awhile he knelt in silence, then in an audible whisper he prayed. And his prayer brought help and strength.

‘I will go home with you, Miss Theyn, if you will permit me,’ he said at last. ‘The Canon will follow. I do not think he will go to the Rectory for some time yet.’

Mr. Egerton’s surmise was correct. Till long past midnight the Rector of Market

Yarburgh knelt and prayed in the chancel of the church he loved so well. In a very agony of prayer he knelt, and his prayer was for the most part a prayer of intercession. That prayer may not be written on this page. It is written elsewhere — in the book that is open before the Great White Throne.

END OF VOL. II.

[July, 1887.



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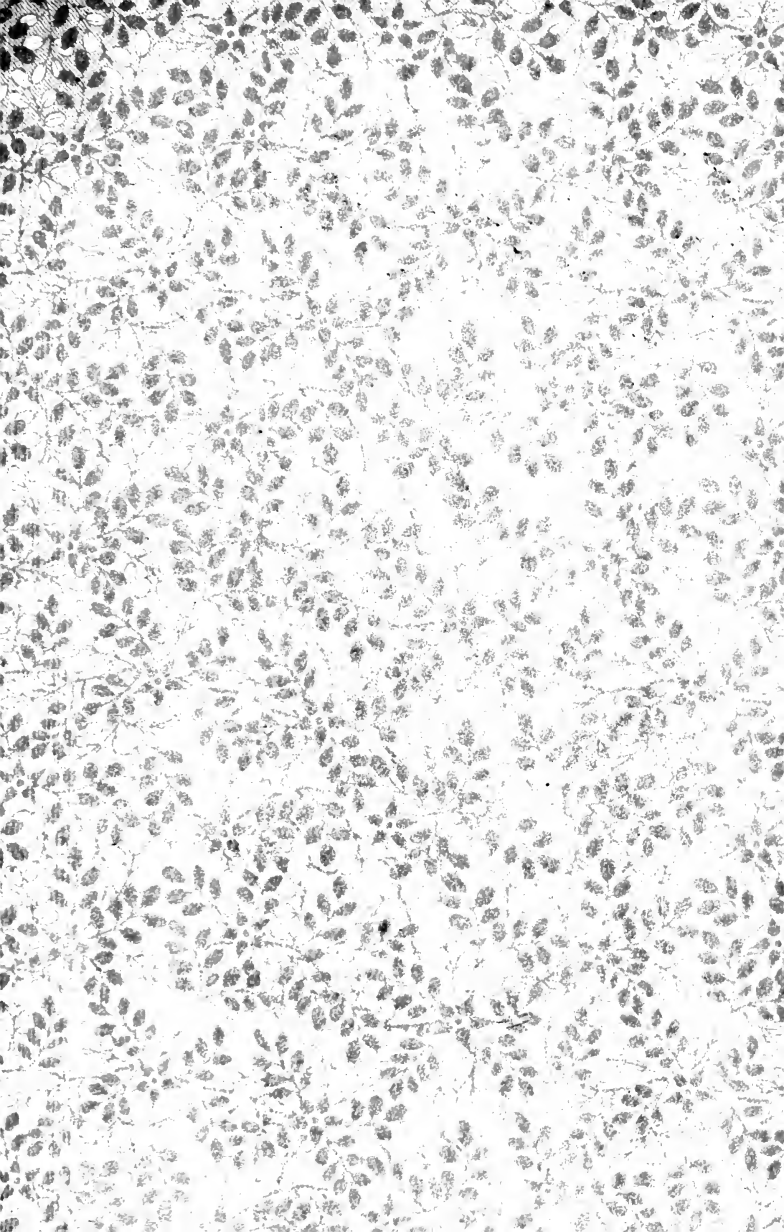
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